

"For any kid who's felt like a misfit, this crackling adventure packs a wallop!"

—LINCOLN PEIRCE,
creator of **BIG NATE** and **MAX & THE MIDKNIGHTS**

The MISFITS

A ROYAL CONUNDRUM



NEWBERY HONOR WINNER AND
NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST

LISA YEE

ART BY CALDECOTT MEDALIST

DAN SANTAT

EDUCATORS' GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

When a notorious thief is out for priceless treasure (gems! cats! general decorum!)—who’re you gonna call? An elite team of crime-fighting underdogs, that’s who! The Misfits are on the case in this hilarious illustrated series from Newbery Honoree Lisa Yee and Caldecott Medalist Dan Santat!

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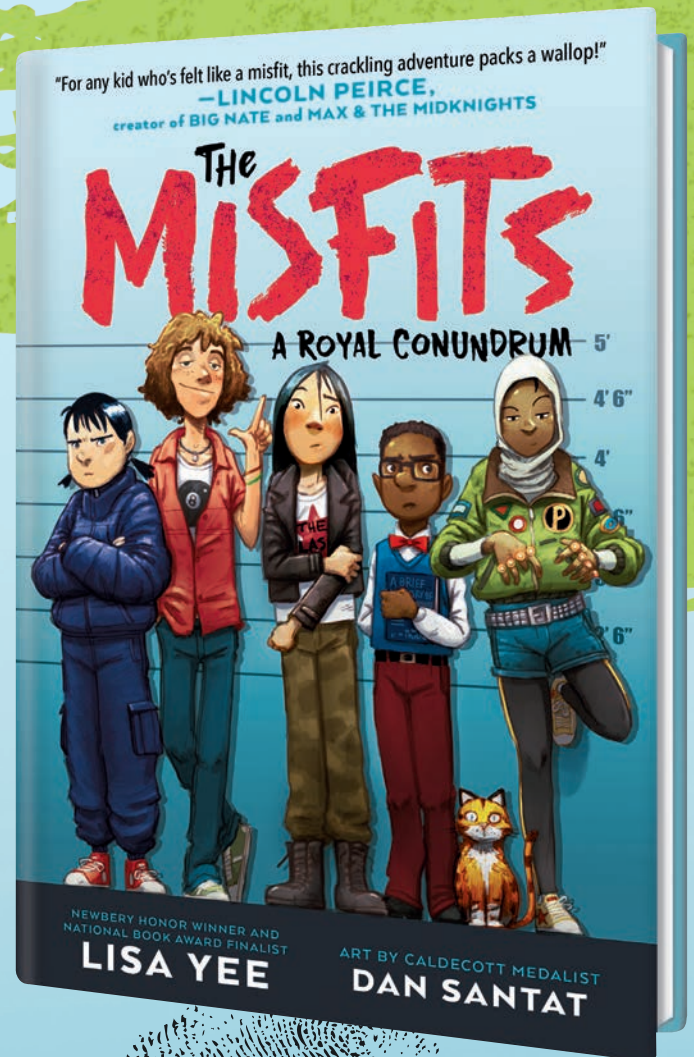
Olive Cobin Zang has . . . issues. And they mostly aren’t her fault. (No, really!) Though she often slips under the radar, problems have a knack for finding her. So, imagine her doubts when she’s suddenly dropped off at the strangest boarding school ever: a former castle turned prison that’s now a “reforming arts school”!

But nothing could’ve prepared Olive for RASCH (not “rash”). There, she’s lumped with a team of other kids who never quite fit in, and discovers that the academy isn’t what it seems—and neither is she. In fact, RASCH is a cover for an elite group of misfits who fight crime . . . and Olive has arrived just in time.

Turns out that RASCH is in danger of closing, unless Olive’s class can stop the heist of the century. And as Olive falls in love with this wacky school, she realizes it’s up to her new team to save the only home that’s ever welcomed them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Yee has taken a private-investigator course, and it’s slightly possible that she’s a secret undercover operative. She’s also a Newbery Honoree and a National Book Award Finalist for *Maizy Chen’s Last Chance*. Some of her other twenty-one novels are the groundbreaking *Millicent Min*, *Girl Genius*; *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*; and the DC Super Hero Girls series. A frequent contributor to NPR’s Books We Love, she divides her time between Western Massachusetts and Los Angeles.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Dan Santat is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and the illustrator of over a hundred books. His picture book *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* received the Caldecott Medal. He also illustrated *The Blur*, *Lift*, and *Drawn Together*, written by Minh Lê, which all received critical acclaim. Dan is also the creator of the Disney animated hit *The Replacements*. He lives in Southern California with his family. Learn more at dansantatbooks.com or visit him on Instagram and Twitter at @dsantat.



PRAISE FOR THE MISFITS

“**FULL OF HEART AND HUMOR WITH TWISTY TURNS** and unforgettable underdogs. Just like the priceless jewels the team is trying to protect, **THIS BOOK IS A TOTAL GEM.** You’ll wish you were a misfit, too.”

—JAMES PONTI, *New York Times* bestselling author of *City Spies*

“There are hilarious high jinks and outlandish plot points aplenty, plus an astonishingly inventive array of technology that would **MAKE EVEN JAMES BOND JEALOUS.**”

—BOOKLIST

“A fantastical blend of **QUIRKY CHARACTERS AND GOOFY ADVENTURES.**”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS

“**CLEVER AND FUNNY,** this rousing mystery-adventure will be a hit with a wide audience.”

—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Action, adventure, and fun with a group of young underdogs worth rooting for. **THE MISFITS ARE A TEAM OF HEROES FOR THE OUTCAST IN EVERYONE.**”

—SHELF AWARENESS

“**A RAPIDLY PACED** narrative.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“**AN ENTERTAINING MYSTERY** with good kids working together to defeat the bad guys and, in the process, finding their place in the world.”

—THE HORN BOOK





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Olive says she felt herself shrink when Principal Gates forgot her name. When she found out there was no record of her at school and when her mother forgot how old she was, she felt even more invisible. However, Olive claims, “Invisibility had its benefits” (p. 17). Have you ever felt invisible or forgotten? How has it helped you? How has it hurt you?
- One of Olive’s most treasured possessions are her *Meggie & Her Fun Family* comic books. Why do you think she loves these books so much? How is Meggie’s family different to Olive’s family?
- During “The Conundrum,” Sunny asks Olive for one word that describes her. Olive answers with “misfit.” What is a misfit, and why does Olive consider herself one? What word would you use to describe yourself and why?
- Pod 101 is led by Modest Cusak and Monica LaMonica, whose special skills are in ballet and boxing, respectively. How might these skills be useful for the Misfits?
- RASCH, or the Reforming Arts School, is a unique place. How is RASCH different from other schools, and why is RASCH so important to the children who attend it?
- Olive’s grandmother Mimi has lots of sayings. One of them is “The unexpected can be exhilarating. Keep an open mind and give things a chance before judging too quickly” (p. 30). Can you think of a time when you gave a chance to something unexpected and kept an open mind rather than dismissing it right away? What happened, and how did the experience affect you?
- There are a few instances of bullying in the story. At one point Smote and his friends approach Olive and tell her “Chinatown’s that way!” while speaking in gibberish meant to mimic Chinese (p. 127). Why were these comments hurtful to Olive? If you were a bystander, how could you speak up as an ally to Olive? If you were in her shoes, how could you have responded differently than the Misfits?
- Olive describes her emotions as swirling around like a smoothie in a blender. The text says, “Only instead of strawberries, kiwis, and bananas, hers was made of delight, depression, and confusion” (p. 41). Have you ever had several conflicting emotions all at the same time? What emotions did you have, and why? What is your current emotional smoothie made of?
- Pod 101 is a division of NOCK, which stands for “No One Can Know.” Describe NOCK. What do they do, and why do you think Olive and the other Misfits were chosen to be a part of this group? (p. 94)
- Another of Mimi’s sayings is “Backup singers are unsung heroes. Without them, most songs would sound flat” (p. 165). What do you think Mimi meant by this? Can you think of an example of people acting as “backup singers” to enrich a situation or issue?

ACTIVITY IDEAS

ART EXPLORATION

- *Gymkhana Map*: Pod 101 is told to ready themselves for the gymkhana splore. James explains that gymkhana is “a British Raj term for a place where skill-based contests are held” (pp. 73–74). Chapter 10 describes the students’ awe when they see the gymkhana for the first time. Using the descriptions in the text, draw a map of the gymkhana. Use labels to note what is included in the gymkhana and what skills are evaluated in each area.
- *Gadget Design*: Phil is a technological genius, and she invents many products for the Misfits to use out in the field. These inventions look like normal everyday objects but they disguise specialized uses. For example, FoggyGogs are glasses that allow the wearer to see through fog and smoke, Snooze Vapors are bracelets that hold a sleep-inducing mist to use on enemies, the Ultra Stick jams doors shut or locks shoes to the ground, and Time Out String is strong, gooey string to tie up bad guys. Imagine that you are tasked with creating the next gadget to help Pod 101. Design your invention and include both a picture and words to describe how it is used.

LANGUAGE ARTS

- *Character Profile*: Create character maps for different characters such as Modest, Philomena, James, and Dame Gloria Vanderwisp. Using evidence from the book, write a brief character description that includes three or four facts about each character. Include an illustrated portrait of each character.
- *Sticky Vocabulary*: Author Lisa Yee includes many games, anagrams, and interesting vocabulary words in her book. Build up your own vocabulary by marking new or unknown words from the story with a sticky note. Think about what the word could mean in the context and write down a possible definition on each note. Look up each word to see if your definition matches the one in the dictionary.







YOUR OWN CONUNDRUM!

A conundrum is a challenging and often confusing problem or question. The RASCH Conundrum takes the form of a test with rapid-fire questions whose answers may determine your pod placement.

Try it out yourself by jotting down answers as quickly as you can to the questions below.

- What is your favorite animal?
 - Where would you like to go on Tuesday?
 - What is one of your pet peeves?
 - Whom do you admire?
 - What is something you are really good at?
 - Do you prefer to eat with your hands or with a fork?
 - If your name wasn't [your name], what would it be?
 - What is your strongest sense (touch, sight, smell, hearing, or taste)?
 - What word describes you?
 - Would you rather save a rainforest or go on a luxury vacation?
 - Do you get scared?
 - How would you spend one hundred dollars?
- 
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Next, set a timer for ten minutes and draw all you can remember about a new place you have visited recently (for example, a dentist's office, a grocery store, or a restaurant).

Don't forget to add lots of details, including about the people you met there!

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'VE FINISHED THE CONUNDRUM.

Review your answers and picture and think about what kind of person you have described. Do you have a good memory? Are you detail-oriented? What things do you value? After reflecting on your answers, determine what pod you would likely be placed in: visual arts, theater, music, writing, or something else. Why do you think you would do well in that pod?

Educator's guide prepared by Joanne Yi, PhD. Joanne is a former elementary teacher and an adjunct assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at Indiana University. She researches diversity and inclusion issues in children's literature.



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