

**Literature Circle Guide to *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by
E. L. Konigsburg**

Book Summary

“Claudia knew that she could never pull off the old-fashioned kind of running away...” so she decided to run not *from* somewhere but *to* somewhere—somewhere large, warm, comfortable, and beautiful. And that was how Claudia and her brother, Jamie, ended up living in the Metropolitan Museum of Art—and right in the middle of a mystery that made headlines.

Author Information

E.L. Konigsburg was born in New York City. She worked hard as a student and graduated first in her high school class, and then studied chemistry in college. While pursuing a master’s degree in chemistry, Konigsburg decided she would rather teach. She moved to Florida with her husband and became a science teacher at a private girls’ school. But soon Konigsburg stopped teaching in order to raise her three children. In her spare time, she attended painting and drawing classes and won awards for her artwork. As her children grew older, she turned to writing. Now, with three Newbery Awards and millions of devoted readers, Konigsburg continues to write and illustrate.

Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions

1. Claudia and Jamie work as a team on their adventure. Claudia does the planning while Jamie controls the expenses. List one example of Claudia performing her job and one example of Jamie performing his job. **One possible answer is: Jamie decides they will walk to the museum from Grand Central instead of taking a bus in order to save money. (p. 28) Claudia plans where they will hide during their first night at the museum. (p. 35)**
2. The fountain in the restaurant at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is useful to Claudia and Jamie for two reasons. What are they? **Claudia and Jamie use the fountain as a bath. They also use the fountain as a source of income by taking the coins that customers throw in. (pp. 81-84).**
3. Why is the Angel statue such a popular attraction at the museum? **The great artist Michelangelo may have sculpted the statue. (p. 58)**
4. Why does Claudia decide to run away at the start of the story? **Claudia feels that she suffers from injustice. She is also bored with her life. (p. 6)**
5. Claudia and Jamie make a good team, but they are very different people. As a result, they sometimes disagree about what’s important and what they should do on their adventure. What are some specific examples from the adventure that show how Claudia and Jamie are different people with different opinions? **Two examples include: Claudia wants to eat at nice restaurants, while Jamie**

wants to eat at cheap restaurants to save money. (p. 68) Claudia wants to sleep in a fancy bed at the museum and be comfortable, while Jamie wants to sleep on the bathroom floor to make it more of an adventure. (p. 38)

6. How does the nature of Claudia and Jamie's arguments about their differences of opinion change throughout the story? **At first, Claudia and Jamie are frustrated with each other's different opinions, but eventually they learn the benefit of working together. Jamie learns that Claudia's careful planning (i.e., being a "fussbudget") makes the adventure possible. Claudia learns that Jamie's caution with money (i.e., being a "cheapskate") gives them enough money to survive. (p. 39)**
7. Why does Claudia cry when she sees Michelangelo's sketch of Angel at the end of the story? **She finally learns the secret that she has been seeking throughout the story. (p. 146)**
8. In chapter 4, Claudia says she thinks the Angel statue looks like someone in her family. Who does Claudia think the statue looks like? **Herself. (pp. 63-4)**
9. In chapter 7, Jamie rents a post office box pretending to be Angelo Michaels from Marblehead, Massachusetts. Why does Jamie choose this name? Why does he choose to pretend to be from a town called Marblehead? **Angelo Michaels is a play on the name Michelangelo. Jamie chooses Marblehead as the town because the Angel statue is made out of marble. (p. 104)**
10. Jamie and Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler are both good at playing cards. How would the story be different if neither of them ever won at cards? **If Jamie never won at cards, he would not have the money he won from Bruce to pay for the adventure. (p. 16) If Mrs. Frankweiler never won at cards, she would not have won the Angel statue. (p. 148)**
11. Imagine a friend wanted to spend 24 hours at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Using Claudia and Jamie's experiences as a guide, write a schedule that describes how your friend should spend his or her 24 hours at the museum without getting caught. **Answers should include the following basics, but can be much more elaborate:**

5:00 p.m.: Hide in bathroom stalls to avoid guards.
5:30 p.m.: Exit bathroom after guards are gone.
6:00 p.m.: Find a bed where you can conceal yourself and go to sleep.
Early morning: Stash your things and hide again in bathroom stalls.
After 10:00 a.m.: Exit bathroom and tour museum.
(pp. 39-46)
12. Imagine you could skip school and live anywhere in the world for one week. Where would you go? Why? Who would you bring with you? Why? **Answers**

will vary.

13. Why is Claudia ready to go home again at the end of the story? **She discovered that running away from home didn't change her. (p. 138)**
14. In chapter 9, Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler says, "Some people spend all their time on a vacation taking pictures so that when they get home they can show their friends evidence that they had a good time. They don't pause to let the vacation enter inside of them and take that home." Describe a place you visited that entered inside of you and changed you. How did it change you? **Answers will vary.**

Note: These questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-5; Application: 6-7; Analysis: 8-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-14.

Activities

1. Chapter 4 contains a map of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Draw a map with at least five rooms of a museum you would like to visit. The rooms can contain whatever you like. For example, Claudia and Jamie use a typewriter to write to the director of the museum. One room in your museum could contain a collection of writing instruments—from a quill pen that Marie Antoinette might have used to a computer. Other rooms could include collections of baseball cards or footwear. **Encourage students to be creative and to include items that are specific to their tastes.**
2. The story describes a sculpture of an angel by the famous artist Michelangelo. If you were a sculptor, what would you make a sculpture of? Marble was Michelangelo's favored medium for sculpture. What materials could you use that were not available to artists in the Renaissance? Soap? Play-Doh? Draw a picture that shows the sculpture you would like to make. **Encourage students to be creative with their drawings and their choice of materials.**
3. While at the museum, Claudia decides to sleep in a fancy canopy bed from the sixteenth century and pretend to be Marie Antoinette, who was once the Queen of France. Write a journal entry describing a night you would like to have pretending to be a person from the past. What person would you pretend to be? Why would you like to be that person for a night? What would the person's bedroom look like? **Encourage students to be as specific as possible in their descriptions.**
4. Tape a sheet of construction paper to the underside of a table. Lie down on your back and try to draw or paint a scene as Michelangelo had to do while working on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. **Encourage students to be creative in what they choose to draw.**