



**Name of Session:** The Mysteries of Harris Burdick

**Facilitators / Creators:** Quinn Pursell and Sarah Sullivan

**Age Group for Participants:** 4th-8th Grade

**Context:** This exercise is a great way to stretch your imagination, get it started with a mysterious and unusual prompt and see where it goes!

**Origin of the exercise:** This exercise is centered around the book, [The Mysteries of Harris Burdick](#) by [Chris Van Allsburg](#)

**Objectives:**

- *To stretch your imagination*
- *To use an image to create a story*

**Linked Media Content:**

Session Video with Sarah & Quinn: <https://youtu.be/NBxgRCMidiw>

Images from *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*: [THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK](#)

Other readers' stories inspired by these images (and a place to share yours!): [Who is Harris Burdick?](#)

**Materials:**

- Something you can play video on (laptop, phone, etc.)
- Paper and pen or laptop to write your stories

**Process:**

1. If you would like to follow along with us, you can watch our video [here](#), where we go through the history of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* and discuss each of the images individually. You can also read the transcript of the video at the bottom of this document. Or, if you'd prefer, you can follow the process below.
2. Start by reading through the introduction written by Chris Van Allsburg to introduce the images and the history behind them. You can find the introduction and the images here: [https://mrsgraveswebsite.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/8/12686140/the\\_mysteries\\_of\\_harris\\_burdick.pdf](https://mrsgraveswebsite.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/8/12686140/the_mysteries_of_harris_burdick.pdf)
3. Take a look at the first image, "Archie Smith, Boy Wonder." What do you notice about the image? Take notes about what is intriguing, striking, interesting, creepy, or mysterious about this image.
4. Repeat this task with each of the images, taking notes of what stands out to you about the drawings.
5. Once you have your notes for all of the images, write a story. You can write as many stories as you'd like for whichever images are the most interesting to you. Feel free to write multiple stories for a single image.
6. Once you are done writing, post your story or stories on social media with the hashtag #CreativityIsNotCancelled and #BurdickReport and tag us on Instagram as @risingyouththea

**Variations:**

- *If you would prefer to respond to the images in a different way (making a dance, writing a poem, drawing a picture, making a collage, etc.) feel free to do so!*

***Transcript (in case you do not have access to audio / video)***

QUINN

Thank you for being here with us today. I'm Quinn Pursell

SARAH

And I'm Sarah Sullivan. We are teaching artists with Rising Youth Theatre, and we are excited to share a session with you today, based on one of our favorite books, Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*.

If you don't yet know about these mysteries, you can check the link in the video description or the session plan for more information. However, you don't need to do that in order to participate

QUINN

And now we're going to step into role - for the rest of this session, we are not Sarah and Quinn, teaching artists, we are stepping into role as Quinn, investigative journalist determined to get to the bottom of the Burdick mystery once and for all

SARAH

And Sarah, the archivist who has promised to hold and protect the documents left by Mr. Burdick.

*Change our backdrops*

QUINN

We all know the story of Harris Burdick and his mysterious, left behind images. I first heard about the Burdick drawings when I was a kid, and I always believed there was something else there, something we didn't know, a strange truth behind these seemingly unbelievable images. Were these stories really just the imagination of a creative and brilliant mind? Or were they something more. Something true. Something impossible.

I'm Quinn Pursell. And this is the Burdick Report - a new podcast that will look at these familiar pictures and the stories behind them in a whole new way.

*Music plays*

*We see images of the Burdick pictures*

QUINN

To get started, I spoke with Sarah Sullivan. Librarian and personal archivist to Peter Wenders, former publisher, and the person who first discovered Harris Burdick's stories. She has been caring for and protecting the collection for the past eleven years.

SARAH

If you don't know the story of the Burdick drawings, I'll tell you now. The drawings were left to me by my former employer, Mr. Peter Wenders. Thirty years ago a man called at Peter Wenders' office, introducing himself as Harris Burdick. Mr. Burdick explained that he had written fourteen stories and had drawn many pictures for each one. He'd brought with him just one drawing from each story, to see if Wenders liked his work. Peter Wenders was fascinated by the drawings. He told Burdick he would like to read the stories that went with them as soon as possible. The artist agreed to bring the stories the next morning. He left the fourteen drawings with Wenders. But he did not return the next day. Or the day after that. Harris Burdick was never heard from again. Over the years, Wenders tried to find out who Burdick was and what had happened to him, but he discovered nothing. To this day, Harris Burdick remains a complete mystery.

When he died, Mr. Wenders entrusted me with the secrets left behind, and I take that very seriously.

QUINN

Do you believe that the rest of the stories are out there?

SARAH

I do. But there's a reason that Harris Burdick didn't bring all of the stories to Mr. Wenders originally. If it was just about getting stories published he would have brought everything.

QUINN

So why didn't he?

SARAH

I can't know that. I wasn't there.

QUINN

The more people I talked to, the more mysterious the stories seemed. Everyone felt there was more to the story, but nobody seemed to know what. So now, I'm bringing it to you. The listeners of the Burdick Report. What really happened.

ARCHIE SMITH, BOY WONDER A tiny voice asked, "Is he the one?"

UNDER THE RUG Two weeks passed and it happened again.

A STRANGE DAY IN JULY He threw with all his might, but the third stone came skipping back.

MISSING IN VENICE Even with her mighty engines in reverse, the ocean liner was pulled further and further into the canal.

ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER TIME If there was an answer, he'd find it there.

UNINVITED GUESTS His heart was pounding. He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn.

THE HARP So it's true he thought, it's really true.

MR. LINDEN'S LIBRARY He had warned her about the book. Now it was too late.

THE SEVEN CHAIRS The fifth one ended up in France.

THE THIRDFLOOR BEDROOM It all began when someone left the window open.

JUST DESSERT She lowered the knife and it grew even brighter.

CAPTAIN TORY He swung his lantern three times and slowly the schooner appeared.

OSCAR AND ALPHONSE She knew it was time to send them back. The caterpillars softly wiggled in her hand, spelling out "goodbye."

THE HOUSE ON MAPLE STREET It was a perfect lift-off.

QUINN

So now I'm relying on you. We don't have information, so we need you to help us find the whole story. We're asking you, our listeners to write the full stories behind these images. What really happened.

The images themselves are all in the show notes (that is, they are linked in the digital session file provided to you), and we'll share them here, with some music for you to write to. Write one story - or ten - but please. Share them with us. Put them on social media with the hashtag #CreativityIsNotCanceled and #BurdickReport and help us solve this decades long mystery.

The Burdick Report is produced by Rising Youth Theatre, and me, Quinn Pursell. Thank you to my guest, Sarah Sullivan, and to Chris Van Allsburg for the source material. Thank you for listening and as always, don't stop investigating the mysterious.