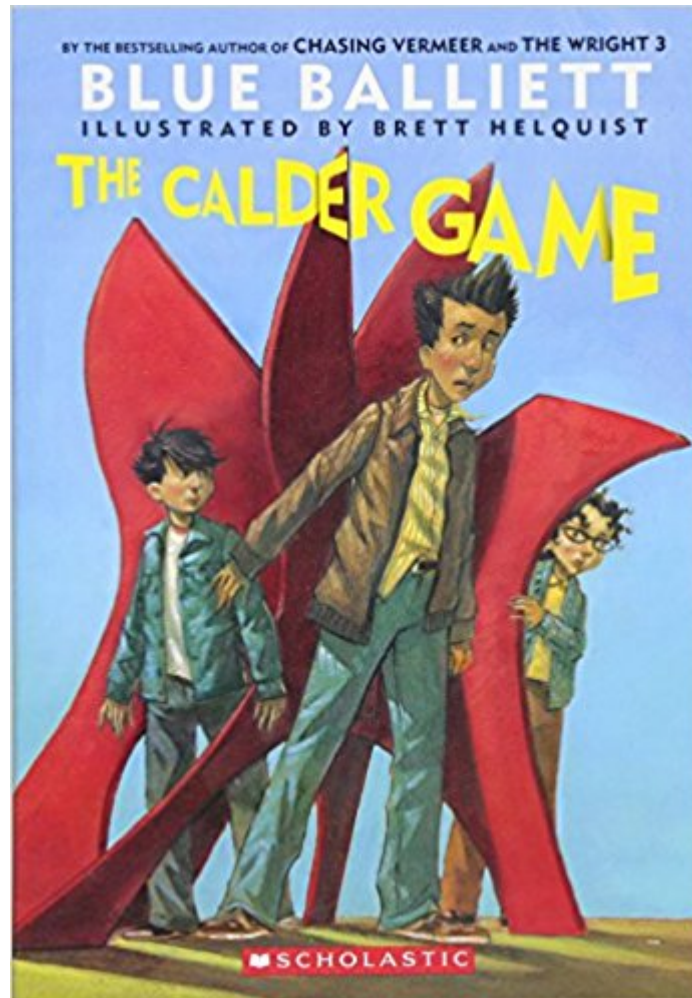




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The Calder Game



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Synopsis

This new mystery from bestselling author Blue Balliett is now available in After Words paperback! When Calder Pillay travels with his father to a remote village in England, he finds a mix of mazes and mystery . . . including an unexpected Alexander Calder sculpture in the town square. Calder is strangely drawn to the sculpture, while other people have less-than-friendly feelings towards it. Both the boy and the sculpture seem to be out of place . . . and then, on the same night, they disappear! Calder's friends Petra and Tommy must fly out to help his father find him. But this mystery has more twists and turns than a Calder mobile . . . with more at stake than first meets the eye.

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Grade 5 • Those precocious art sleuths Calder, Petra, and Tommy are back, and this mystery is every bit as intricate, engaging, and delightful as *Chasing Vermeer* (2004) and *The Wright 3* (2006, both Scholastic). The three seventh graders go with their class to an exhibit of Alexander Calder's mobiles at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Soon after, Calder and his father travel to a remote village in England that has an anonymously donated Calder sculpture, the Minotaur, and a maze at Blenheim Park. Both the boy and the sculpture disappear on the same night. Balliett's love of words and her ability to tuck hidden, subtle clues into her story are evident

throughout. Petra and Tommy fly to England to help Calder's dad and the police find their friend. The kids see mobiles everywhere: in the leaves, flying crows, paper trash. Indeed, the whole story is structured as a mobile, with plot and characters twisting and turning, moving and dancing around each other. The young sleuths are able to take what seems to be chance and coincidence and apply their own conclusions to the puzzle wrapped inside this mystery. Balliett's wonderful writing is full of foreshadowing, literary allusions, wordplay, and figurative language. Calder's signature yellow pentominoes play an important role, and the kids create a new code. Helquist's detailed illustrations enhance this multilayered story. Fans of the author's previous novels are in for a treat in this latest adventure.

—Connie Tyrrell Burns, Mahoney Middle School, South Portland, ME Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Starred Review Calder, Petra, and Tommy, seventh-graders with a penchant for solving art mysteries, return in a new adventure that takes them across the sea. When Calder's father goes to England to attend a conference, he takes Calder along and, rather surprisingly, allows him to wander the streets of tiny Woodstock, where they are staying, and explore nearby Blenheim Palace alone. Before Calder leaves, his class visits an exhibit of famous artist Alexander Calder's work, including an innovation of the museum, the Calder Game. It invites participants to make or visualize mobiles of real or imaginary objects, and throughout the story, the trio continues to play in various ways. Once in Woodstock, the boy is shocked to see one of Calder's sculptures, a recent donation that is despised by the residents. Then the sculpture goes missing, and so does the boy. Both the disappearance of the unsupervised Calder and the arrival of Petra and Tommy to hunt for their friend are contrivances. But to focus on the warts misses the beauty of the story as well as its potent messages about observation, imagination, and connections. Balliett doesn't shirk from putting her characters in danger, but what's fascinating is how she weaves in the kids' attraction to puzzles, words, and found objects as she moves them through literal and figurative mazes. Balliett again offers readers new ways to think. Grades 5-8. --Ilene Cooper --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

I have two copies and as a grandma I read a chapter at bedtime and my grandson follows along in his book. Great for the third or fourth grade reader, it's a little challenging and that's what I'm

reading, but it mentions real places and real artwork That we can Google and look at later

This third volume following the bestselling *Chasing Vermeer* and *The Wright 3* continues the adventures of three sixth-graders--Calder, Petra and Tommy--in solving another art mystery. When Calder Pillay travels with his father to a remote village in England, he encounters both mazes and mystery -- including an unexpected Alexander Calder sculpture (Minotaur) in the town square. Both the boy (who was named after the artist) and the sculpture disappear on the same night! Petra and Tommy fly to England to help Calder's father find him. This mystery twists and turns like a Calder mobile in high wind. Who is the mysterious girl with the camera? Who is the injured man found in the woods? Is there a secret room behind the waterfalls? What is the meaning of the puzzling graffiti left in place of the missing sculpture? Is there an even more twisted game afoot? Blue Balliett captures the personalities and minds of each character with deft strokes and draws the atmosphere for each scene with masterful nuances. It feels authentic because the author actually visited all the places she describes -- the 1000-year-old village, the graveyards and mazes, the palaces and gardens, the waterfalls and bridges. She has a fine ear for the subtleties of accents and characters' turns of phrase. This is a book to savor. In this volume, Blue Balliett focuses on the art of Alexander Calder, whose mobiles (hanging) and stabiles (floor-based) revolutionized modern art and gave it a fourth dimension, motion through time. The ever-changing perspective that never looks the same twice leads us to reflect on change in general...now you see it, now you don't...and how each experience changes us as well, moment by moment. At one point in the story, the three young friends get separated, each trying to find the next clue and keeping up their courage in scary situations. Their ordeals lead them to a stronger bond between them, a greater appreciation of each other's differences. For this reader it was good to have them be rid of their previous animosities. Back home in Chicago, the kids also see a welcome change in their classroom, where their previously restrictive teacher has also had a happy transformation through the inspiring power of Alexander Calder's art. Blue Balliett's enlightened teaching philosophy shines through the pages here. Thoughtful readers will especially enjoy the intricate mix and balance between art lore, teaching inspirations, literature and philosophy, art as puzzle, puzzles as ideas, ideas as art. Rather like a mind mobile, wouldn't you say? There is a secondary puzzle to decode, hidden in Brett Helquist's delightful illustrations, using Alexander Calder icons as an alphabet.

My kids and I read every night before bed time and enjoy a good mystery. Unfortunately, this story could not keep our interest....not mine and not my kids. We gave up on it somewhere after the kid

went to England. It was also unrealistic...what responsible parent would allow their 11 year old to run around a foreign country unaccompanied? (For that matter in the states?) Sorry, Blue...we just couldn't hang in there.

What can I say about Blue Balliett? I loved *Chasing Vermeer*. I enjoyed how she fused art with mystery and had fun with a concept totally new to young readers. With *The Wright 3*, I thought she terribly overplayed her hand. The book was all over the place and utterly confusing. Still I could tell, the voice, the potential was there and I believed that one day Balliett would knock our socks off. I hoped that this time around she'd abandon Petra, Calder, and the gang and venture into a new mystery, but no such luck. So how does her third novel, *The Calder Game*, fare? Calder, Petra, and Tommy are still struggling with the idea of being a trio. Petra and Tommy can't get along because each one wants Calder all to themselves, which puts Calder in an awkward position. So when his father heads to England for a conference, Calder escapes the tension by traveling along. He's excited, upon arriving, to discover that the village of Woodstock where they'll be staying, harbors an original Alexander Calder (the artist the boy was named after) sculpture, named *The Minotaur*. Later, when the sculpture is suddenly stolen and Calder disappears shortly afterwards, Petra and Tommy journey with Mrs. Sharpe to England to help Calder's father find their friend. When comparing to *Chasing Vermeer* and *The Wright 3*, I would probably rank this one somewhere in between. It's definitely a major step in the right direction after *The Wright 3*. Its biggest downfall however, is its utterly slow and somewhat boring beginning. Chapter One of this book is a very short, one page description of an eerie setting and a missing boy. We, the reader, know this boy is Calder and are supposed to feel excited about reading on and discovering why he's gone missing. I love hooks like this, when they're done well. The problem with this hook? I feel it's actually more of a cop-out, especially after reading what follows. I got the feeling while reading this, that Balliett wrote the first one-third of her novel before she realized that she hadn't even gotten to her problem, thus the plot of her story, the stolen sculpture and the missing boy. It's then that she probably decided to go back and sprinkle these "mysterious" flashbacks in the beginning, to hold her reader's attention as a promise that she was in fact, getting to her point. I wasn't fooled. Balliett seems to do a lot of incoherent rambling here and makes no real attempt at putting together the pieces laid before her, or moving her story along. She's a better author than this and the beginning one-third of this particular story comes off sloppy, lazy, and hurried. We begin in the past, we're rushed to the future, only to be brought back in time yet again. It's confusing. The beginning of this book reads an awfully lot like *The Wright 3* and I found myself putting it down quite often, not wanting to return to it. But I'm

glad I did. Once the story finally gets going, it's rather good. In *The Wright 3*, I felt sorry for the characters, who seemed to desperately want to do some real detective work, but that Balliett didn't supply them with any. Her new book, actually has a story to tell, without random nonsense floating throughout it. Finally, in *The Calder Game*, Balliett does away with Petra's "visions", Calder's pentominoes (well, not entirely), and even allows Calder's father to come to the front of the stage and become quite the information-seeker. Gone are the friendly confines of Chicago's Hyde Park and gone is the company of the all-to-lovely Ms. Hussey (the three's new teacher, Ms. Button, is incredibly cranky). I think these slight changes give this series a well needed shot to the arm. Petra and Tommy's realization that they are alone together, in another country, and both grieving the loss of Calder, was well-written, albeit inevitable. It'll be interesting to see where Balliett takes us next, considering that the three children are over their differences now. Where *The Wright 3*, and even *Chasing Vermeer* to a certain extent, dangled way too many unnecessary story pieces in front of us, some that never did fit in anywhere, *The Calder Game* does a fine job of putting everything together without wasting any information. My only complaint about the ending is Balliett's need to sit us down and explain carefully HOW each and every puzzle piece fit. The last three or four chapters are literally, explanations. If you're going to do away with the unnecessary information, then trust your reader to put together some of the rest, on their own. These books have a nice look and feel. Brett Helquist's illustrations are creative and the jacket covers are colorful and engaging. I just don't find myself enjoying what's inside them as much as I want to. Blue Balliett has interesting ideas, and I love how she centers each story around a deserving artist. I feel like they're not executed as well as they could be. *The Calder Game* was pretty good though, so I still have faith that eventually she will put all her talent together and produce something far beyond what *Chasing Vermeer* even was. I still wish she'd give these characters a break and dabble in something different, but I don't see it coming. So until then, it's her potential that will probably lure me back to a fourth book to see what this trio has in store for us.

I loved this book. Although I buy Blue Balliett books for my grandchildren, I read them myself first. I have found each to be captivating. The plots are tight, the settings vivid, and the characters real, making the suspension of disbelief not at all difficult. (The grandkids like them too.) I especially enjoyed *The Calder Game*. I loved Balliett's opening description, her use of the Calder mobile, and her excellent writing. BSH

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My daughter loves this author.

great book!

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