

Sam Swallow and the Riddleworld League—a guide for readers

Chapter 1: The House at the End of the Tram Line

The story starts at Sam's house. Where is it? What does Sam see and do? Pay attention—you'll need to know about these things later!

What does Sam WANT to do? Why? What's Sam's family like? Where does he fit in the family—is he the youngest, the oldest, in between? What's Uncle Donovan like? What are the kids at school like? What's the difference between *short* and *little*?

Think about your own home—is it like Sam's or is it different? Do you have any pets? What does lettuce look like when it's growing in a garden? What do sunflowers look like? What happens at the end of the chapter, when Sam leaves his house?

Sam likes numbers and words; he also likes playing with puns and solving puzzles. The first puzzle he plays with is called an ANAGRAM. An anagram is a puzzle that uses all the letters in a word to make up another word or words. For instance, if you rearrange the letters in the word FEBRUARY, you can get BEAR FURY or BURY FEAR.

With the place name SASKATCHEWAN, you can make a much larger number of anagrams—including ANT CASES HAWK, or WASH ANT CAKES, or BAKERY HID CAT, or A HACKSAW NEST. (You could even make WHEAT SNACKS—but then you'd have an A left over, so that wouldn't quite work!)

Can you make an anagram out of your own name, or the name of your school? You can get online help making your own anagrams at www.wordsmith.org/anagram/index.html

A different kind of word puzzle could ask: How many words can you make out of the letters in another word. In the word FEBRUARY, can you find BE, BAR, BARE, FARE, BEAR, FEAR, YEAR, FAR? what else?

Chapter 2: Signs and Splinters

Something strange has occurred—where is Sam now, and what's happened to him?

Everything is silent to start with, and then Sam hears something—*rhyming? laughing?* What's a rhyme? How does Sam react? What's this new world like?

Suddenly Sam encounters a lot of birds. What birds can you see in your own back yard, or on telephone wires or in a field or park near where you live? What words can you make from the letters in the words *eagle*, *kingfisher*, *cardinal*, or *pigeon*?

How useful are broken signs? Do they help Sam or not? Is he *puzzled* by them? Do you think he should pay more attention to them than he does?

Chapter 3: Old Swivelhead's Advice

How does Sam behave when he meets other creatures?

What can you find out (in books or online) about Owls—especially about the Snowy Owl, the Barred Owl, the Great Horned Owl, and the Saw-Whet Owl?

How much time appears to be going by? Why has time been important to Sam, even from the beginning of the story?

Sam is told he's in Riddleworld. How is Riddleworld different from his back yard? Does anything in Riddleworld—the Admirable Bird, perhaps, or the lettuce patch, or the sunflowers—remind you of his home? Which parts of this chapter are told in rhyme?

Sam is given a challenge in this chapter. Is the way through Riddleworld (and to the Park) going to be straightforward? Who gives him the clearest advice—or is all the advice confusing to Sam? What TEN RIDDLES or PUZZLES will he have to solve? Who will help him? How clear are the Old Owl's clues? Will Sam have difficulty solving the puzzles? Will you be able to solve them before he does?

Chapter 4: CrossWord Gardens

Sam overhears the whispering birds talk about Klaw, the Raven, the Riddle City statues (remember the pterodactyl?) and a babybird story about "The Swallow and His Friends." When Sam was back home, did anyone in his family read or tell stories to children? What stories do you remember from your own childhood? Did any of them tell of magic, or daring deeds, or helping others who needed help?

What does the Wingdings font on a computer printout look like? Does it read like a code? What other codes can you think of—perhaps Morse code, or semaphore, a numeric code, a barcode?

As Sam moves forward into the Gardens, he realizes he's facing the first of the Old Owl's riddles. It's in several parts. The first is the crossword puzzle. (Look in your local newspaper—does it include crossword puzzles? are any of them designed for young readers?) If you solve all the horizontal clues, a vertical message will appear

down the middle of the puzzle—what does it say? How does Sam use this message? (Keep the baseball terms in mind—Sam’s going to keep using them.)

The second part of the clue asks Sam to create a word by using the S: how does he do this, with the ‘unflowers’? How does the syllable ‘un’ affect the meaning of many words in English—think of the difference between ‘fit’ and ‘unfit’, or between ‘happy’ and ‘unhappy.’ What other examples can you think of?

Several puns show up in this chapter (remember that Sam likes puns as well as puzzles). What’s funny about him being ‘penned in by a (quill) fence?’ (what does the word ‘quill’ refer to?) What word do you get by putting the words ALPH and ABET together? What else does the word ‘abet’ mean?

Sam must also figure out an anagram before he can move forward. Did you figure it out before Sam? Has Sam figured out yet why the rhymes are important? Why do you think they are?

Chapter 5: The Riddleworld League

Does Sam notice right away that he’s facing the first part of Riddle Number Two? Did you?

The number puzzle is called a ‘Fibonacci sequence.’ It involves adding two numbers together to get the next number. If mathematics interests you, you can find out more about Fibonacci at [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fibonacci>].

Did you notice all the bird names? In real life, these birds would never be found in the same parts of the world. Are any of these birds in your back yard? You can find out more about the birds in this book at [<http://carolinabirds.org>], where photographs of the birds of the world are arranged by continent.

Try drawing bird pictures—or a bird mural—starting with your favourite birds from the rhymes in this chapter (or those in your back yard).

Sam at last meets Doriana and Cort (do they remind you of anyone?) and together they form the Riddleworld League. How do they help Sam—and why does he get annoyed and start to think they’re not helping?

What does Cort mean by saying ‘in basketball you don’t carry’? (HINT: in the game of basketball, a player can pass the ball to another player or else *dribble* [i.e. bounce] the ball while running around the court, but not run and hold the ball at the same time.) But read carefully: who or what will Cort have to carry later on?

Towards the end of the chapter, Sam says to *forget the signs*—is he losing track of what he has to do?

Chapter 6: Trapped?

Why isn't Sam listening to his friends? Should he be? What changes his mind?

Where does Nevar's name come from?

When does Sam start to hear the rhymes again, and how do they help him? How many rhymes can you find in the conversation between Sam and his friends?

When the friends reach the sunflower field, they find the *palindrome* (a series of words that reads the same forwards and backwards). The sign is also an example of an *acrostic* puzzle, where the first letters in a series of words spell out another word. Another important acrostic already appeared in Chapter 3—Sam didn't see it then (did you?), but Doriana will figure it out in Chapter 7.

Here's another riddle for you: What word looks the same when you turn it upside down? (Answer: NOON)

Chapter 7: The Tower in Riddle City

What signs do Sam and his friends see—have they seen them before? What signs can you see in your own neighbourhood—are any of them as strange as those in Riddleworld?

Riddle City is in the heart of Riddleworld. How many puzzles do the friends have to solve here? There's an *acrostic*. There's a series of *embedded clues*. (An embedded word occurs when the arrangement of letters in a phrase hides yet another word. For example, in the phrase 'friends have to solve,' can you find the word 'shave' or the word 'veto'? or the French word *rien*, which means 'nothing'?) Sam and his friends have also entered the MAZE—but have they solved Riddle Number Three?

Remember what the Owls told Sam in Chapter 3? That he'd need two friends—one would be a Careful Giant and the other a Smallbird with brains? And what did the Owls tell Doriana and Cort in Chapter 5—that they had to help a Very Big Smallbird and a bird who was Smaller than Big but Taller than Short? What else was Cort told (to stand up straight and learn his own strength)? What happens in this chapter that answers these questions? What happens that solves Riddles Four and Five (the tongue-untwister and the song)—does Sam even know he's solving Riddle Five?

Have you ever been in a Maze? Maybe a garden maze, or a corn maze in a cornfield—or even a confusing shopping mall? Try drawing a maze.

Chapter 8: The Maze

Why is the key important? (Is there any other key in Sam's story?)

Are the anagram puzzles a 'key' to Riddle Number Six? There's also another embedded puzzle in this chapter, and a word-picture riddle (the clue that's written into the ice.)

By the end of the chapter, Sam says he's solved two more riddles—and that he can do the rest on his own? See if you can find the Eagle before he does—you'll have to read Chapter 9 to find out—and what happens when he counts down from ten?

Chapter 9: Riddleworld Park

You'll meet Riddles Seven, Eight, and Nine in this chapter—does Sam even realize he's solving two of them?

Why do the friends linger before they go their separate ways? Why does Doriana talk about the meaning of her name? For more information on what names mean, you can look at any of several online sites.

In Chapter 8, Corbin-the-Dark announced his name. What does 'Corbin' mean? You might want to find out if the other names in the book carry any special meaning. Does your own name have a special meaning?

Is the baseball game in Chapter 9 realistic? Does this matter? What things cause Sam to lose focus? What starts him to re-focus? Who's counting at the end? What does 'home' mean? And why does Sam ask about 'today'?

Chapter 10: Home

When does Chapter 10 take place, and what's happened between Chapter 9 and Chapter 10? Has anything changed? Has Sam changed? Has Ollie?

Sam was concerned about his name in Chapter 1. How does he deal with names in Chapter 10? (Remember what his brother Cory told him in Chapter 1, and think about what his uniform says now.) Also remember what Cort said to Sam about names, and then think about the names of Sam's team-mates in this chapter.

Coach tells his team to 'remember the eagle'—and then he recites a series of *haiku*: a 3-line verse form in which the first line is three syllables long, the second line seven syllables long, and the third line five syllables long. How do these verses help Sam understand what 'focus' means? A haiku does not rhyme—but are there any rhymes in this chapter?

Is there anything in this chapter than reminds you of Riddleworld?

What do you think Sam has achieved by the end of the book?