



Gold

John Wilson

Reading level: 4.5

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Book Summary

Sam and Annabel are on vacation with Annabel's parents in Italy. While visiting the small hilltop town of Civita, they hear rumors of looted gold from World War II buried somewhere in the town's network of underground tunnels and caves. Once again the two friends cross paths with their old nemesis, Humphrey Battleford, but he is not the only one in pursuit of the gold. An intimidating man named Kurt, the grandson of a ruthless Nazi, is also snooping around. After Annabel is kidnapped, Sam must solve the mystery of the hidden treasure to save his friend.

This is the fourth mystery featuring Sam and Annabel, after *Stolen*, *Bones* and *Lost*.

Author Biography

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, **John Wilson** grew up on the Isle of Skye and outside Glasgow without the slightest idea that he would ever write books. After earning a degree in geology from St. Andrews University, he worked in Zimbabwe and Alberta before moving to Vancouver Island, where he writes full time. John is addicted to history and firmly believes that the past must have been just as exciting, confusing and complex to those who lived through it as our world is to us. Most of his novels and nonfiction books for kids, teens and adults deal with the past. His tales involve intelligent dinosaurs, angry socialist coal miners, confused boys caught up in the First and Second World Wars, and the terrors faced by lost Arctic explorers. John spends significant portions of his year traveling across the country, telling stories from his books and explaining their historical background and getting young readers energized and wanting to read and find out more about the past.

Connecting to the Text***Character and Novel Study***

- Below are evocative quotes from *Gold*. Use these questions to prompt discussion and writing exercises: Who is speaking and what is the context? When did this happen (before, after or during what event)? What theme emerges through this quote? *Option*: Ask students to choose their own quotes and trade with one another.
 - Ch. 2: “History doesn’t end. It keeps going until it gets to us.” (Pietro)
 - Ch. 8: “So the stories are true!” (Pietro)
 - Ch. 8: “Gold...Throughout history, men have done incalculable evil to obtain it.” (Pietro)
 - Ch. 13: “There’s blood mixed in with that gold.” (Sam)
 - Ch. 13: “The chance of suddenly becoming incredibly rich looms in front of me.” (Sam)
- Ask students to imagine they are Sam or Annabel at the end of the novel. Jack, Annabel’s father, asks, “Do anything exciting today?” Have students respond by acting out a talk-show interview, summarizing the day’s events. Or, if they prefer, they can create a blog post. Ask them to include drawings, photos or video from a web search of Orvieto or Italy. What was most exciting, scary, rewarding?

Building Vocabulary

The following words are used in the novel in the contexts noted below. Ask students to write paragraph responses, incorporating three or four vocabulary words in each. *Option*: Invite students to view orvietoviva.com/en/ for inspiration. As with all online content, preview to ensure it’s appropriate for your students.

- Imagine you’re experiencing Orvieto with Sam and Annabel. What can you see, hear, touch and smell? What is interesting and inviting to you?
- Describe what happened when Sam found the gold. What was the Eagle of Death?
- Sam and Annabel learn a lot about the landscape around Orvieto, Italy. Describe some of its unique features. Would you enjoy exploring this area?

<i>Experiencing Orvieto</i>	<i>Discovery of Nazi gold</i>	<i>Landscape</i>
cafés	carved	eroding
cathedral	Eagle of Death	hillside
cobblestone	incalculable evil	honeycomb
collection	gold bars	landslide
museum	serious	slope
ornate	soldier	tunnels
sculpture	robbers	valleys
tourists	treasure	volcanic rock

The Writer's Craft***Descriptive Language***

Writers use descriptive language to give readers particular impressions of characters and situations. Invite students to complete one of the following.

1. Highlight descriptive words used to introduce Annabel's parents in chapter 1. What does their description tell you about them? (e.g., curious, goofy, fun, friendly, etc.)
 - Jack: unruly tufts of red hair, beat-up bush hat, piercing blue eyes, on the move
 - Pam: always neatly dressed, stylish, bright, flowery summer dress
2. Consider the people Sam and Annabel see at Bagnoregio in chapter 2. From the way they're described, what can we guess/anticipate about them?
 - Kurt and Ethan (two men with motorcycles, who are looking for Nazi gold): dressed in motorcycle leathers; one is large with a shaved head and looks like an extra from an action movie; the other is shorter, skinny and has slicked-back black hair and a goatee
 - Pietro (the man who helps them and shows them the museum): mop of white hair, very thick glasses

Personification

1. Writers make scenes come alive for readers by making interesting comparisons that spark our imaginations (metaphor, simile, analogy). With personification, a human characteristic such as will or emotion is attributed to a non-human thing. Review the examples below with students. What is the human attribute, and how does using it deepen our understanding of the scene?
 - Ch. 5: *I charge along the path, branches slapping at my face and legs...*
 - Ch. 11: *Annabel is on her feet across the small room, squeezing me in a fierce hug.*
 - Ch. 13: *There's blood mixed in with that gold.*
2. Ask students to compose sentences, based on the novel, using personification. Ideas:
 - Sam learns the Nazis stole the gold from murdered victims at Auschwitz. He also knew the eagle was a clue to the gold, inscribed by a Nazi. How did these make him feel? How would Sam describe the gold and the eagle?
 - Describe the fog in the valley, the landslides, vines growing on wooden doors, the church in the village square or the flow of tourists visiting.

Connecting to the Curriculum***History***

1. There are more than 1,200 caves and tunnels under the city of Orvieto, Italy. Why did people build the tunnels, and what did they store there?
2. Different peoples lived where Orvieto is now, as Pietro notes: "but it is very difficult to tell whether a particular tunnel was dug by Etruscans, Romans, medieval monks or just a merchant two hundred years ago looking for a cool place to store his olive oil" (ch. 2). Draw a timeline that includes these periods. Extend it to include World War II and today. For each period, include images

that are indicative of it (e.g., gold jewelry, a Roman coin, a crucifix, olive oil, soldiers, tourists, etc.).

3. Kurt and Ethan looked for gold stolen and buried by Nazis during World War II. In chapter 3, Pietro described this as the “greatest theft in history.” Websites to explore this topic:
 - The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has educator resources, lesson plans, etc.: ushmm.org/educators.
 - PBS LearningMedia has a segment on artwork looted by Nazis, including Picasso and Matisse masterpieces discovered in Munich in 2013: pbslearningmedia.org.

Earth Science, Geography

1. As Sam and Annabel learn, “the hill the old town is built on is eroding. Every year it gets smaller as pieces slide into the surrounding valleys” (chapter 1). As a research activity, invite students to learn more about butte, erosion and tuff.
2. Orvieto, Italy, is situated on a large *butte*. Write a short description and note two other examples of buttes.
3. What’s the difference between a butte and a *mesa*?
4. What are two natural processes that can cause *erosion* of slopes/hills?
5. Find an example of soil or land erosion in your state or province. What causes it?
6. *Tuff* is an igneous rock made from volcanic ash released during a volcanic eruption that later compacts. Find two interesting things about tuff.

Italian Language

The novel showcases the culture and language of Italy.

1. Ask students to find and translate five key words from the novel (English to Italian) and the words Battleford’s men used in chapter 12 (Italian to English). An online search will locate free translation engines. Encourage students to utilize audio features. Examples of key words include:

gold	<i>oro</i>	valley	<i>la valle</i>	history	<i>storia</i>
hidden	<i>nascosto</i>	diary	<i>il diario</i>	thief	<i>il ladrone</i>
rescue	<i>salvare</i>	kidnap	<i>rapire</i>	museum	<i>Museo</i>

2. Ask students to translate these phrases from chapter 12.
 - *Non muoverti. Cadere la pistola e mettere le mani sopra la testa.* (Do not move. Drop the gun and put your hands over your head).
 - *Sbrigati!* (Hurry up!)

Art

1. The Etruscans lived 2,500 years ago and had a rich artistic tradition, including gold-jewelry making and bronze sculpting. They used a process called lost-wax casting.
 - Describe the lost-wax technique. Why is it called “lost” wax?

- What would be the pros and cons for the Etruscans of using this method?
- Imagine you have only the resources available to Etruscans, so no electricity. What would be different in the lost-wax technique then compared to using it today?

Option: To demonstrate using an impression, work with students to make sand candles. This is done by pouring melted wax into an impression left in sand. Impressions can be made with a glass jar, a small box, etc. (There are many how-to videos online).

2. A highlight of the city is the Orvieto Cathedral, which Sam notes is 700 years old. While sharing images of the cathedral and area, ask students:
 - What features of the cathedral interest you? (buttresses, glass, sculptures, etc.)
 - If you could visit Orvieto, what would you like to see/experience and why?

Connecting to the Wider World

Sam and Annabel learn about people stealing artifacts and treasure, from tomb robbers at Monterozzi to Nazi plundering in World War II. They also run up against Humphrey Battleford, a collector with “unlimited money” and a history of buying artwork illegally.

- Annabel says, “That’s the trouble with the way [he] does things.” What did she mean by this? What are the implications of personal collectors buying historical artifacts illegally? After all, Battleford said, “I take better care of my collections than many museums do.”
- Consider the gold Sam discovered in chapter 7. In your opinion, who does it belong to (Italy, Germany, Kurt and other ancestors of Max Brunner, Sam, Battleford, etc.)? If you were in Sam’s shoes, would you keep the money or give it away?
- Find out more about IFAR, the International Foundation for Art Research. If you were Sam, would this be the charity you’d choose, or would you choose another?

More Orca Currents by John Wilson

Bones (also featuring Sam and Annabel, who learn about paleontology while solving a mystery at a dinosaur dig in Alberta, Canada)

Lost (Humphrey Battleford enjoys matching wits with Sam and Annabel in the Arctic, and Sam must save an artifact that could hold the key to the Franklin mystery)

Stolen (while in Australia, Sam and Annabel realize there may be a link between a fabled shipwreck and the theft of a special artifact)