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### Chasing Vermeer

Laura Wadley

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Balliett, Blue. *Chasing Vermeer*. Illustrated by Brett Helquist. Scholastic Press, 2004. ISBN 0439372941. \$16.95. 254 pp.

Reviewer: Laura Wadley

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fiction; Detective and mystery stories; Adventure stories;

Subject: Art--Juvenile fiction; Vermeer, Johannes, 1623-1675--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

*Chasing Vermeer* is the story of Petra Andalee and Calder Pillay, students at the University of Chicago Laboratory, who get involved in a school art project that turns into a mystery involving the theft of Vermeer's *A Lady Writing*. Petra and Calder meet a cranky old lady who is both unpleasant and intriguing. Calder communicates with his friend Tommy in a secret code (which the reader must decode to follow the story line). A boy named Frog is kidnapped, and Calder fiddles endlessly with a set of pentominoes, plastic geometric shapes used by mathematicians, to solve the mystery of who took the painting and why.

*Chasing Vermeer* begins bright with promise – the text is highly interactive and the various mathematical constructs are intriguing to children gifted with numbers. Balliett stuffs the narrative with clues, red herrings, and artistic and mathematical references, helped by illustrator Brett Helquist who incorporates clues into his pictures. One expects all this complexity to be resolved in the end; instead, Balliett finishes the story in a couple pages of solutions using characters previously tangential to the main story line.