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### The Man with the Red Bag

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Bunting, Eve. *The Man with the Red Bag*. Joanna Cotler Books, 2007. ISBN 9780060818357.  
\$15.99. 230 p.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Detective and Mystery Stories;

Subject: Travel--Juvenile fiction; Prejudice--Juvenile fiction; Terrorism--Juvenile fiction; Books-  
-Reviews;

Twelve year-old Kevin is on a Star Tours trip to Yellowstone, Mount Rushmore, and the Grand Tetons with his widowed grandmother. The group of 18 people has embarked just a year after 9/11, and Charles Stavros, a gentleman who looks like he is of Middle East descent and always clings to his red travel bag, immediately catches Kevin's attention. Kevin wants to be an author of mystery stories, and he takes notes on everything suspicious Charles Stavros does. His detective assistant is Geneva, who is on the trip with her dad. This trip was ordered by the divorce court judge, but Geneva, who blames her father for not being there when she needed him as a child, is anything but nice to her father. Soon others in the group also begin to distrust Mr. Stavros. It is as if Kevin and Geneva *want* Mr. Stavros to be a terrorist, so they can catch him, turn him in, and be heroes. What is in the red bag? Why is he so secretive about its contents?

This is a great little mystery and an episode that will lead readers to think more deeply about their prejudices against other nationalities and cultures. The story also reveals how difficult it is to heal from tragic events which happen in our families, such as the death of a loved one, separation and divorce. In the end, Kevin and Geneva come to realize that everyone has their own "precious and private" things they want to keep from everyone else. It is only when you really get to know people, and really try to put yourself in their place, that they are willing to share their own personal stories and innermost feelings.

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