

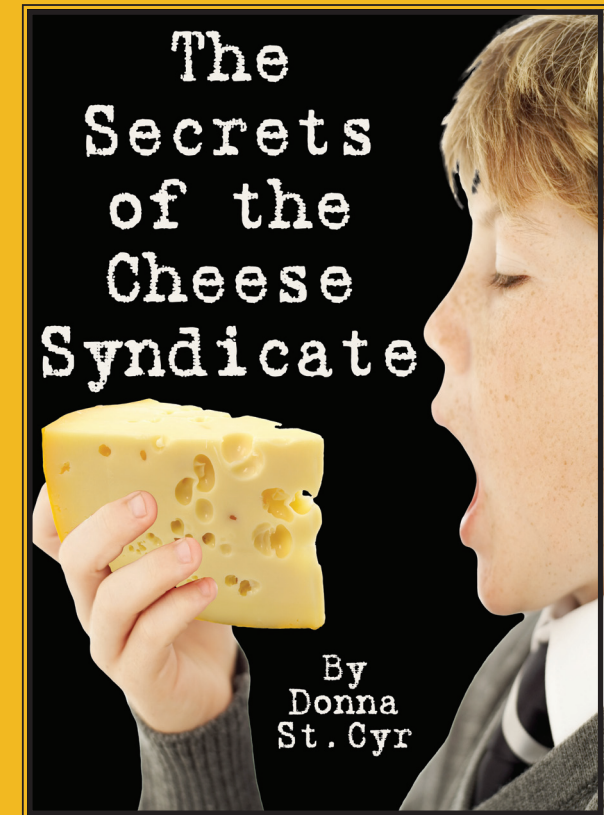
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There are several novels right now grounded in Greek mythology. How does this novel embrace that tradition? Move away from it?
2. Robert is quickly thrown into a difficult situation he knows little about. Name some of the situations. Have the students brainstorm solutions for the situations.
3. The chimera was once an ally of the Cheese Syndicate. Have the class create their own stories on what changed the chimera.
4. The Cheese Syndicate teaches Robert about the magical properties of some cheeses. Pick a cheese they didn't mention and make up a magical property for it. What could you use it for? Write an adventure where the students use their cheese.
5. What is each student's favorite cheese from the book? What is their favorite cheese to eat?
6. Who is the real hero of the book, Robert or Janine? Can they both be the hero? What are some other stories that have more than one hero? How are they different from *The Secrets of the Cheese Syndicate*.

BOOK CLUB ACTIVITIES

1. Cheese plays an important role in the novel. Have each member of the class bring a different cheese to enjoy during the discussion. As an added activity, students could research and present some information about the history of their cheeses.
2. There are many monsters and creatures from Greek mythology in the book. Have the students draw and color their favorite monster.
3. Using art-supply modeling clay and toothpicks, have each member of the class create their own monster or piece of cheese.
4. Play a trivia game based on Greek mythology. Have each member of the class write three separate trivia questions on three different cards. Some of the questions should be based on the book and others can be based on general Greek mythology.

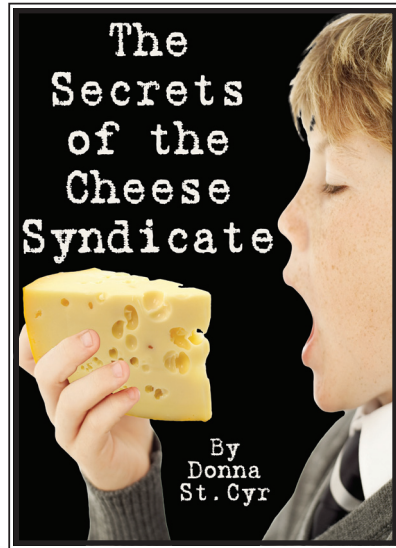
THE SECRETS OF THE CHEESE SYNDICATE



CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Robert Montasio did not think his day could get any worse until his sister drinks a bizarre soda that causes her to start shrinking. Robert's only hope is a mysterious organization known as the Secret Cheese Syndicate. Unfortunately, they cannot help without a special cheese that has been lost for years. Now, with a tiny little sister in his pocket, Robert has to travel the world to find the Mystic Cheese of Eliki and, perhaps, discover secrets from his family's past. Along the way, he's helped and hindered by various characters from Greek mythology. Can Robert save his sister or will he never survive the worst day of his life?



ABOUT DONNA ST. CYR



Born and raised in southern Louisiana, Donna returned to Baton Rouge after briefly living in Maryland. Her family consists of one wonderful husband, two dogs, and three beautiful children. She always knew she would grow up to write stories because as a child she spent many happy hours creating adventures for herself and her horse Lightning. Lightning was really a blue “hoppity-hop,” but that didn't make him any less of a horse for Donna.

Donna began writing seriously a few years ago and now divides her writing time between freelance writing for magazines and educational publishers and working on novels and picture books.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONNA

How did you start writing?

My high school English teacher encouraged me to write—she enjoyed my stories and I believe she planted the seed that led me to take up writing, albeit many years after high school. I didn't write much until I turned 40, when I began to pursue my writing in earnest.

What interested you in Greek mythology?

I have loved mythology since I was in grade school. I used to have a poster hanging in my room—it had the major gods and goddesses in a circular chart, complete with some pretty cool graphics. I spent many hours contemplating their roles and stories.

What gave you the idea of magical cheese?

Well, we all know from the advertising campaign that there is a certain “power of cheese”. I believe that phrase was lying somewhere in the back of my mind when I began the Cheese Files stories—and I needed a vehicle to convey magical properties in my fantasy world—and Gorgonzola is such a fantastic word—and it all sort of came together.

What gave you the idea for the Cheese Syndicate?

I like the idea of a secret society, especially one that stands for justice. The concept of the unsung, unthanked guardian (or in this case organized group of guardians) that stands between our oblivious everyday lives and real chaos is a common thread that runs through literature. I have always enjoyed mythological stories with this element and once I created Madame Gorgonzola, I knew immediately she represented a larger structure—the Cheese Syndicate—who worked in the shadows to ensure the greater good of society.

Do you have any more Cheese Syndicate books planned?

There are at least two more stories in the Syndicate files. As is usually the case, the villains in one story have separate histories of their own—and both Daimonas, the mantichore, and the three-headed chimera have stories that need to be told. I'm currently editing *The Mantichore's Revenge*, a story that sheds some more light on Daimonas' own motivations and his desire to destroy the Syndicate. Although the chimera's story needs to be told, I haven't put any of it to paper just yet.