

**Chasing Vermeer**  
**By Blue Balliett**

**Characters:**

**Ms. Hussey** - 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher at University School. She had a long ponytail and 3 rings in each ear. From Nantucket Island in Massachusetts. Received one of the letters.

**Calder Pillay** - Main character, 11 years old. Lived on Harper Avenue. Birthday was Dec. 12. Hated to write.

**Walter Pillay** - Calder's father, from India. His job had to do with planning gardens for cities.

**Yvette Pillay** - Calder's mother, from Canada. Taught math at the University of Chicago.

**Petra Andalee** - Main character, 11 years old. Lived on Harper Avenue. Birthday was Dec. 12. Loved to write. Had 4 younger brothers and sisters. Named after an ancient stone city in Jordan.

**Frank Andalee** - Petra's father, a physicist at the University of Chicago.

**Norma Andalee** - Petra's mother.

**Denise Dodge** - Classmate of Calder and Petra.

**Tommy Segovia** - Lived across the street from Calder. Good friend since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

**Zelda Segovia** - Tommy's mother. Worked at the University as a librarian. Married a man from Bermuda.

**Old Fred** - Zelda Segovia's second husband. AKA **Fred Steadman**. AKA **Xavier Glitts**, leader of international crime ring. AKA **Glitter Man**.

**Vincent Watch** - Man with red suspenders who worked at Powell's. Calder's boss. Received one of the letters.

**Charles Fort** - Wrote *Lo!* in 1931. Book was a collection of strange occurrences and disappearances.

**Frog** - Name of kid next door to Tommy in New York. "Disappeared."

**Louise Coffin Sharpe** - Elderly woman who lived on 59<sup>th</sup> Street, about a block from Calder. Had unusually green eyes and wore her hair in a tidy white bun. Her husband was a Vermeer scholar. From Nantucket Island in Massachusetts. Received one of the letters.

**Leland Sharpe** - Vermeer expert who died in Amsterdam 31 years prior.

**N.B. Jones** - Curator in charge of arranging the loan of "A Lady Writing."

**Mrs. Trek** - Principal at the Lower School (gradeschool) at the University School.

**Setting** - University of Chicago's "University School" at Hyde Park, Illinois.

**Questions:**

How many people did an art thief send a letter to? (two women and a man)

"Pentominoes" - Set of 12 shapes, each made up of 5 squares. Named after letters in the alphabet.

How did Calder receive his first set of yellow plastic pentominoes? (Cousin in London sent them as a 12<sup>th</sup> birthday present)

Where did Calder work? (Powell's Used Book Store)

Where did Ms. Hussey's class take a field trip to? (Art Institute of Chicago)

What did Petra count at the Art Institute when she was younger? (Paintings with red clothing; bare bottoms; hats-123)

Where did the museum guard find Petra and Calder (Storage room)

Which objects did Calder and Petra chose to describe as works of art for their class assignment? (Wooden box and book, *Lo!*)

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- How did Petra get information about Vermeer's paintings in a strange way? (Dreams)
- What was the name of the painting on Calder's box? ("The Geographer")
- Who gave him the box and when? (Grandma Ranjana when Calder was about 5 years old)
- How did Calder and Tommy communicate with each other? (Letters written in pentominoe code)
- What country was the painter, Vermeer, from? (The Netherlands)
- When did Vermeer paint? (17<sup>th</sup> century)
- How many works of art did Vermeer paint? (26 with 9 more "attributed" to him)
- What costumes did Calder and Petra wear for Halloween? (Letter "F" and lady from "A Lady Writing")
- What did Petra keep a record of? (Unexplained stuff)
- On what day was Vermeer baptized? (Halloween in 1632)
- What did Calder and Petra eat to symbolize secrecy? (Blue peanut M&Ms)
- Where did "A Lady Writing" normally reside? (National Gallery in Washington DC)
- What was the name of the art show at the Chicago Art Institute? ("Writers in Art")
- What was the message in the empty packing box when the painting was found missing? ("You will come to agree with me.")
- Who's voice was true to her name? (Mrs. Sharpe's)
- How did Calder and Petra raise money for Tommy and his mom? (Selling brownies on Harper Ave. Raised \$129.)
- What was Leland Sharpe's "breakthrough discovery" about Vermeer's work? (??)
- How large was the painting, "A Lady Writing"? (12" x 18")
- What was the name of the building where the Lower School (gradeschool) was located? (Gracie Hall)
- What did Calder find in the basement of Gracie Hall? (Painting of a woman with a large "ping-pong ball" earring. She was sitting at a writing table. Looked like it was painted by a 2<sup>nd</sup>-grader.)
- Why was Frog missing? (His parents had gone on a long trip and left him in Washington DC with a relative.)
- Where was the painting hidden in Delia Dell Hall? (Behind paneling on 12<sup>th</sup> step)
- Where was Calder and the painting found? (Tree house in Castiglione's backyard)
- How did Old Fred die? (Heart attack on the train)
- What were some of the "12" coincidences?
- 12 names involved with 12 letters in each name
  - 1212 has 12 letters when spelled out
  - "A Lady Writing" has 12 letters
  - Mr. & Mrs. Andalee and Mr. & Mrs. Pillay were each 12 when Leland Sharpe died.

## In What Book...

- Did someone say, "The letter is dead." ? (Ms. Hussey)
- Is Picasso quoted as saying, "Art is a lie, but a lie that tells the truth." ?
- Did someone write, "I have committed a crime, but in my heart I know that my theft is a gift." ?
- Did a thief communicate through newspaper ads?
- Did someone say, "Looking and seeing are two very different things." ? (Mrs. Sharpe)