

Reading Group Guide for

City Spies Book 2: *Golden Gate*

By James Ponti

About the Book

After thwarting a notorious villain at an eco-summit in Paris, the City Spies are gearing up for their next mission. Operating out of a base in Scotland, this secret team of young agents working for the British Secret Intelligence Service's MI6 division have honed their unique skills to go places in the world of espionage where adults can't. Fourteen-year-old Sydney is a surfer and a rebel from Bondi Beach, Australia. She's also a field ops specialist for the City Spies. Sydney is excited to learn that she'll be going undercover on the marine research vessel the *Sylvia Earle*. But things don't go exactly as planned, and while Sydney does find herself in the spotlight, it's not in the way she was hoping. Meanwhile, there's been some new intel regarding a potential mole within the organization, offering the spies a lead that takes them to San Francisco, California. But as they investigate a spy who died at the Botanical Gardens, they discover that they are also being investigated. And soon, they're caught up in an exciting adventure filled with rogue missions and double agents! This mission is hot! The City Spies are a go!

Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Golden Gate* as reflective writing prompts, or, alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. As *Golden Gate* opens, Brooklyn and Sydney are on a mission aboard the *Sylvia Earle*; they ultimately thwart the nefarious plans of the would-be hijackers working for Umbra that attempt to capture and ransom the two daughters of important British citizens. Analyze Brooklyn's and Sydney's actions and reactions to this attempted kidnapping. What do you learn about them based on how they approach this challenge?
2. When a hijacker aboard the *Sylvia Earle* tells the girls there's no time for beauty, Brooklyn berates him by retorting, "That crack about makeup. You think because we're girls all we care about is our appearance? Is that it? That's really sexist." In your opinion, is Brooklyn's assessment of this statement accurate? Explain your answer.
3. In *City Spies*, readers learn that Mother has been looking for his wife and children for a long time. In *Golden Gate*, Mother and the team discover more clues regarding his family's whereabouts and Clementine's possible motivations for taking and hiding their children.

Though Clementine has instructed him to stop investigating, why does Mother seem unable to call off his search for Clementine and his kids? Do you believe his search impacts the City Spies? If so, in what ways?

4. When Brooklyn asks Blix how he knows her age, he tells her, “I have three teenage daughters. I know what twelve-year-old girls look like.” He stops for a moment before adding, “And I know exactly how tricky they can be.” Do you agree with his assessment? How do you think adults tend to view young people? Explain your answers.

5. In *Golden Gate*, Umbra, a global crime syndicate, is once again engaged in terroristic activities, motivated by money. What makes them so dangerous to the City Spies and the world at large?

6. Assigned to protect two girls while on the *Sylvia Earle*, Brooklyn is known as Christina Diaz. Her cover identity is created by the British Secret Intelligence Service’s MI6 and is the name of a beloved writer for children. If you had a chance to have a cover identity, would you want one? If so, what name would you use and why?

7. After stunning Alice and Judy with her ability to bring down a hijacking goon, Alice incredulously asks Brooklyn if she’s an “MI6 asset.” Brooklyn says, “We’re not going to worry about what I am.” Given what you know about this particular mission and the City Spies in general, why is it so important that their existence remain top secret? What do you think would be the toughest part of keeping that secret?

8. As Mother criticizes Sydney for her conduct during their mission, she snaps, “It’s not like I left them alone. They still had Queen B looking after them . . . What was that you called her on our last mission? A natural spy. The best you’d ever seen?” What is it about Brooklyn that makes Sydney and the others so jealous? Why do you think they feel this way? How might they deal with these feelings? Explain your answers.

9. “FARM” life for the City Spies includes competitions for fastest safecracking, obstacle course completion in near total darkness, building the most powerful explosive out of ordinary household objects, and memorizing long strings of numbers and letters. In the novel, readers discover the FARM as a place “where being a kid and being a spy went hand in hand.” In your opinion, what would be the coolest part of getting to be a City Spy? What do you see as the greatest challenges to this dual lifestyle? Explain your answers.

10. At its heart, *City Spies* is a story about family. What textual evidence from *Golden Gate* supports this statement? How does this found family remind you of your own? What are some ways in which they are unique or complicated?

11. Starting with her actions on the *Sylvia Earle*, Sydney begins to doubt her contributions and value to the City Spies team. Do you agree or disagree with her views? What important skills do you think she offers the group?

12. Based on what you learn in *Golden Gate* and your impressions from *City Spies*, who is your favorite spy? What is it about this particular character that makes you admire them? Give examples from the books to support your answers.

13. Consider the secret mission the City Spies believe Mother and Brooklyn are engaging in: Do you agree or disagree with Mother's decision to involve Brooklyn in the search for his family? Support your position. Do you think he will ever stop looking for them?

14. Clementine provides Mother with a picture of their children on a flash drive. Kat tells the group that it's difficult to understand why Clementine has done this, because they're "only seeing caterpillars" when they also have to see the cocoon, or how things fit together. How does Kat's unique way of understanding relationships help the group better understand what they need to do?

15. When discussing the awkwardness between them, Brooklyn tells Sydney, "I'm the one who's trying to fit in. I'm the outsider joining a team that's thick as thieves. You guys have been together for years, and you were the second one, so that makes you an OG. I'm the noob. And after all you and I have been through these last few months, I thought we fit in together. I thought we were friends." Were you surprised to learn Brooklyn feels this way? Do you think it was difficult for her to share this? Have you felt similar to Brooklyn or to Sydney in your own life? Explain your answers.

16. Brooklyn shares all she knows about Gilson, who then asks Brooklyn about her real identity. Brooklyn tells her, "I'm the twelve-year-old girl who's running circles around you." Why do you think Gilson has such a difficult time understanding how Brooklyn gained knowledge of her transgressions and crimes?

17. In *Golden Gate*, Tru tells Brooklyn and Sydney, "Mother thinks of you all first as children, and that's good. He should do that. But it's my job to think of you first as agents. And the two of you are very good agents." Given their actions on recent missions, how do the two of them continue to prove themselves to Tru? Do you think this will inspire MI6 to utilize them more often in missions to come? Explain your answers using examples from the book.

18. After capturing Brooklyn, Magpie screams, "You idiot! Now they know exactly where we are," to which Gilson retorts, "They're just kids." Magpie responds by slamming Brooklyn's phone on the floor and stomping on it, declaring, "They are very much not *just* kids." Why do you think Magpie and Gilson have such different understandings of who they are dealing with?

19. After Kat declares that she has sent out 3,797 emails, Paris remarks that this number is random. Kat retorts and declares, "Nothing I do is random. It's a left-and-right-truncatable prime number. Primes do for me what carne asada burritos do for Rio." What makes Kat such a vital part of the City Spies? How do the team's skills supplement one another?

20. Considering the novel's conclusion, what do you predict will happen in the next installment of *City Spies*?

Extension Activities

Use the following research and activities inspired by *Golden Gate* to extend the novel's instructional impact and learning for readers.

SYLVIA EARLE

Brooklyn and Sydney successfully protect the passengers aboard the *Sylvia Earle*, a ship whose namesake is an important American marine biologist. Using library and internet resources, have students research more about Earle's incredible contributions to science and share their most interesting findings with their classmates.

NATIONAL PARKS

As the *City Spies* work to solve the mystery of Rutledge's death and Magpie's identity, they travel to US National Parks like Muir Woods, Fort Point, and Alcatraz. Have students work with a partner to select a national park of choice to learn more. After allowing for exploring and learning, have pairs share what they discovered. They can even design travel brochures to give their classmates a better idea of what the national park has to offer.

JUSTICE IS . . .

The *City Spies* are motivated by the concept of justice and what it means to them. Characters talk about this at different times throughout the books. Discuss the characters' takes, and then have your students write short essays that define what justice means to them.

WOMEN IN STEM

Monty is a cryptographer, Kat is a math genius, and Brooklyn is a hacker. Celebrate these characters by studying famous women in STEM from history. Have students think about the challenges the women faced, the skills they acquired, their motivations and character traits, and how they defined success. Has the reception of women in STEM changed over time?

OPERATION TRANSLATION

The *City Spies* speak a number of different native languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Nepali, and Swahili. Assign your students a list of words and have them translate them into all these languages. Compare how the different variations are similar and dissimilar.

COVER TO COVER

It's interesting to see how books differ across countries. Show your students images of the foreign editions of *Golden Gate* and *City Spies* to compare and contrast. Pick five other popular books and show them the different covers in circulation. Talk about why the cover images might be different for readers around the world.

BRITISH VS. AMERICAN

There is a running joke throughout the *City Spies* series regarding Brooklyn's difficulty in learning British terminology. Though she already speaks English, there are many British terms she doesn't understand. Have your students create a comparison chart listing British and American words that are different but have the same meaning.

This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock in collaboration with James Ponti. Rose is an assistant professor in Library Science Department in the College of Education at Sam Houston State University and holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

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