



# 2011-2012 Mark Twain Award Nominees

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## *The Secret of Zoom*

By: Lynne Jonell

Henry Holt and Company

IL: 3-6 RL: 4.8

### **Summary:**

Christina lives in a stone mansion on the edge of a forest surrounded by barbed wire, an electrified fence, and signs that read TRESPASSERS WILL BE BOILED. Deep within the forest is the laboratory where her mother was blown to bits when Christina was just a baby.

Christina's father, the head scientist at Loompski Labs, knows how dangerous the world can be. So he keeps his daughter safe at home and forbids her to talk to the very interesting orphans down the road.

But when an orphan boy named Taft whispers to her of a secret tunnel, Christina forgets about safety to help him escape. Soon she and Taft discover that there is far more to the orphanage and the mystery of her mother's supposed death than they ever suspected...

### **Themes:**

Orphans, scientists, rocks, singing, adventure, fantasy, magic, flying machines

### **Activities:**

Do research on flying machines and famous aviators. Think of your own flying machine. What would it be made of and what kind of fuel would you use?

The lullaby that was sung to the orphans and perfect pitch voices play an important part in this story. Make up your own lullaby with lyrics and record it.

Both of Christina's parents are scientists in this book. Research a famous scientist and share it with others. What contributions are they remembered for?

Orphans often have a hard time and have to learn to take care of themselves. Research the Orphan Train that was very popular in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Trains traveled from New York all the way through the Midwest including Missouri, trying to find homes for orphans.

Website: <http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/about/history/orphan-trains>

### **Online Resources:**

Author's website: <http://www.lynnejonell.com/>



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### Other books by Lynne Jonell

*Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*, *Emmy and the Home for Troubled Girls*, *Emmy and the Rats in the Belfry*, (coming in July of 2011), *Mom Pie*, *I Need a Snake*, and *Hamster Magic*

### Discussion Questions

1. What is Christina's everyday life like? How is it similar and different to yours?
2. Why and how is Christina sheltered from the outside world? Explain.
3. Why does Christina feel like a prisoner in her own home? Who is her caretaker?
4. How does she feel about her situation and what changes it?
5. Christina takes piano lessons and has a beautiful voice? How is this important in the story?
6. How are the orphans, especially Taft important to the story? What do Taft and Christina have in common?
7. What kind of life do the orphans have and what reasons do they keep them around for?
8. Christina and Taft have different reasons for wanting to go on this mission to find the Secret of Zoom. What unites them?
9. What do they discover in the tunnel?
10. What is the plan that Christina and make? Does it go as planned? Explain?
11. What surprise do they uncover on their journey?
12. What are some of the obstacles they face on their adventure and how do they solve these challenges?
13. How do Christina and Taft rescue the prisoners?
14. What role do the orphans play in the bad guys getting what they deserve?
15. Why does Lenny want to make Zoom? What are his plans for it after it is made?
16. What do Christina and Taft learn about his parents?
17. What will become of Taft now? Explain.