Shadow the Spy
and the Seven Sacred Stones

An Honors Project (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This creative project began with the study of modern children's literature and resulted in the creation of an original poetic manuscript geared toward both children and adults. The illustrations were provided by elementary school students who were read the story and asked to draw pictures according to their individual interpretations of the narration. Many of these illustrations were chosen to accompany the text they represented in the final manuscript. Finally, the illustrations and text were combined using a computer layout program and bound together to form a complete document.

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Shadow the Spy and the Seven Sacred Stones

by Alison Baum
Under a yellow lamppost
That is, a red post with a yellow light.
On a bright and starry night
Our heroine waits and worries
That her contact will not show.

Dane Wilson
Suddenly
A voice surrounds our clever spy:
"With water in the weather, what will walruses wear?"
Surveying with a steady eye:
"It is always darkest when the lights are out," she answers.

"Good evening Agent Shadow," growls the messenger.
She whispers through her whiskers,
"You weren't followed?"
"No."
From out of the darkness steps a pooch with puffy cheeks. "Your mission is simple. It's the circus cats you seek. There is a large lavender tent in a great green meadow on the edge of Edenville. There, in the center circle, you will finally find your catapulting contacts.

These acrobatic informants will give you the details of your most dangerous assignment in the Hawaiian isles."
Then the diligent dog disappeared into the dark.

Rachel
(Before we continue perhaps we should learn more about our feline friend.)

Shadow is a spy of the highest skill. She has proved herself a professional with a license to capture unharmed. She has saved the Queen of England, stopped the bad guys with their bombs, played Juliet in the theatre, and composed secret message songs.
After her canine conspirator left,
Shadow slinked along the slender streets
to the circus
    on the outskirts
    of the city.

Agent Shadow approached,
    quietly watching
the carnival cats
    practice their flips and flops
    in the center ring.
"Ah, when business approaches, 
playtime must end."
whispered the tallest acrobat 
when he saw their special friend.

A four foot feline 
in teal tights 
spoke softly to Shadow,
"You come here for wisdom? 
Which we will provide, but 
we can only answer 
your queries with questions."

Shadow thought quickly:
"What is it that I seek?"
The acrobat advised, 
"What skips across a creek 
before it slowly sinks?"

"Stones," she answered aptly 
with a wink of wisdom 
in her keen spy's eye.

"Someone has stolen stones?"
She was perplexed but pressed on, 
"Who would steal something silly 
like stones?"
"Dr. Herbert Hurricane,"
Shadow said sourly.
"So, Hurricane has stolen
some sacred stones somewhere."

The tabby in teal tumbled
to the right as his brother
back-flipped forward to fall
face to feet in front of her.

He hurried to his paws
his face as pink as his pants,
and slowly stuttered, "Wh...wh...
who escapes each autumn and
c...c...commits catastrophic crimes
using n...n...natural disasters?"

By [signature]
"What purpose do the precious pebbles serve?" she pondered.
A third tumbling tabby tripped over her toes to talk,
"An apocalyptic atrocity awaits the Polynesians of Pineapple Peak."

The flipping feline froze.

A surprised Shadow said, "I thought you could only communicate with questions?"

"Sorry, I slipped," he said and slumped sadly away.

*Circus tonight*
"I recall reading
of the seven sacred stones
that regulate the volatile volcano
of Pineapple Peak," she stated.

"Now that I know
his perilous plan
I must follow his trail
to the islands."

An acrobat in apricot advised:
"When you reach where you are going to go,
greet the great guru girl who can guide you
to the hideout of Herbert Hurricane."

Shadow turned toward the tumblers
to thank them, but they had
darted deftly out the door.
Our fearless feline flew hurriedly to Hawaii where the wild winds wound the water to the shore.
She took the tumbler's tip, and before she began her subsequent search for the daring doctor, she first set out to find the great guru guide, the only one who knew the precise position of Pineapple Peak.

Shadow searched through sandy side streets and passed plenty of pineapples and palms before she discovered the docile dwelling.
"Om," said the little bug
on the flower by her paw.
"Om," said the breeze
as it blew past her ear.
"Om," said the bird
as it flew through the peaceful palms,
straight to the guru's hut.
Shadow followed the finch faithfully.
She came to a clearing where a calm katydid sat cross-legged and contemplating cosmic consequences.

"Tranquility," said the great guru as she bowed to Agent Shadow. "I am glad to see it is you who has made it to my door."

The hut was huge compared to her small silver shell and wispy wings. She meditated on a mat made of magnolias and moss.

I will give you some advice: don't eat with your mouth full, always float when you are sinking, and never follow a man who knows where he is going.

Shadow's head was spinning, but the katydid continued, "I know I may seem battier than a fruitcake, but I promise I will get you where you are going as soon as we get there."

With this, the confusing katydid flew forward into the afternoon. Shadow dragged behind, dazed by the wise one's worldly wisdom.
The guru glanced at the glaring sun, raised her wings to the right, and paraded past parallel palm trees.
She stopped at the start of a steep slope.

"When each of the seven sacred stones is set simultaneously on a sanctified stool, the sea will steam and the stately stone slope will smoke."

The guru glanced expectantly at Agent Shadow and said, "Go."
Then she pointed passionately at the perpendicular peak. A pebbled path popped out from beneath a patch of piled palms.
Shadow meandered through the mountain maze of moss trying to track the tiny trail hidden by Hurricane's henchmen.

She found herself facing a fort, of sorts, with a green gate guarded by gorillas.

They were guerilla gorillas covered completely in camouflage, and before she knew it, she was surrounded.
The guards guided our agent
into the dark depths
of the volcanic void.
There she came face to face
with her eager enemy.

Dr. Hurricane was a small sparrow
with suspicious eyes and a sly smirk.
He spurned the song that sparrows sang
because his chirp was cracked and coarse;
instead
he croaked commands at his cronies
coaxing them to commit crude crimes.
He hated hail and sleet and snow
but had no hang-ups using them,
and other natural nuisances,
to reek havoc on the human race.
He greeted Shadow graciously,
"So, this is the super spy?
You have arrived just in time to see
my final farewell to humanity.
I must arrange the last revered rock
on this ancient altar to activate
this viable Vesuvian volcano."
Shadow saw six of the seven stones placed perfectly on pedestals. She fought frantically to find an inkling of an idea to save the isolated islands.
Promptly, she pondered the perfect plan. A diversion was desirable for her easy escape.

She began by boosting a banana from the pocket of a gorilla guard.

Shadow threw the fruit on the cement floor and the two goons followed with a roar.

While the two watchdogs were wrestling for the fruit, Shadow tumbled toward the demented doctor and tackled the sadistic sparrow before he could place the pebble on the pedestal.
"Sorry Doc, your days of evil doing are done."
The sentries were stunned at her cunning.
They stopped struggling with each other
and stared stupidly at Shadow.

She called headquarters
on her communicator
and told them to send
a squad straight away.

When the volcanic villain was vanquished
he vowed revenge on our cat conqueror:
"I'll be back before you realize
the results of my rabble-rousing."

With the criminal in custody
Shadow commandeered the cove
and all of the doctor's dangerous doodads.
She collected the seven sacred stones
to scatter among her secret storage stations
where her faithful friends could guard them forever.
Then she went home for a long bath.
I saw this project as an opportunity to produce a complete work unlike any other I had ever undertaken. I had never written a children’s story before, and it sounded like a viable challenge. I began by researching the conventions and themes of modern children’s literature. I read books such as *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, *The Polar Express*, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, and many more. However, the book that I was most intrigued by was *Max in Hollywood, Baby* by Maira Kalman. Kalman’s book had a unique quality that I enjoyed immensely. The characters and language were playful and clever. The premise of the story was something a child could enjoy, while the presentation appealed to adults as well as children. This was the perfect example of what I planned to produce with my project. I wanted to write a story that children and parents could enjoy together.

My first draft was a lengthy, and rather dull, prose document. I knew that with children I would have to get straight to the action and make it interesting. My second draft contained a feline character similar to the one from my first attempt. However, instead of a wise old guru, the new cat was a clever spy. The new heroine and the switch from prose to poetic form allowed my ideas to take shape. I enjoyed playing with meter and alliteration. The poetic form made the language of the story more fun to read and write. After several revisions, I felt my text was complete. I had produced an original narrative in poetic form.

My next dilemma was illustrating the manuscript. I was hindered by limited time and mediocre artistic ability. Therefore, I decided that I would have children illustrate my
story. At the same time I was working on this project, I was also involved in a class called Poetry Goes to School in which I taught poetry to students at a local elementary school. This program provided me with convenient access to a classroom setting. It also served as a perfect introduction to my project for the students. For five weeks before I read the students my story, the class and I talked about poetic conventions, discussed examples of famous poetry, and produced original student poems. This background in poetry helped prepare the students for when I finally brought in my project and asked them to draw pictures. I did not have to explain poetry or its varied forms to the students at Daleville Elementary because we had already discussed them for Poetry Goes to School.

I also got permission from teachers at Castle Elementary in Newburgh, Indiana to appear in their classrooms to present my project. My experience with Poetry Goes to School helped me present a more concise and understandable introduction of poetry to the Castle students who had not had the benefit of previously studying poetry. I began by describing my plan for the overall project. I explained as simply as I could that poetry did not have to rhyme or be about love and flowers. I told them poetry could tell a story or be anything they wanted it to be. All of these ideas were adopted from the textbook used in the Poetry Goes to School program. I only emphasized them so the children could understand why my project was still poetry even though it did not rhyme. I also made sure to explain alliteration to them, since I used the element frequently in my story. Next, I read my manuscript to the students. When I finished reading I answered any questions they had and made sure they understood the story. Then I had them draw pictures.
illustrating any scene from the story. They all chose to draw different scenes or characters or places, although I did receive a lot of volcano pictures.

The results of my classroom visits were fantastic. I visited four classrooms and ended up with almost a hundred wonderful pictures from which to choose. Unfortunately, I was only able to use about twenty of the pictures. I sorted through the illustrations carefully, looking for those that best represented the text I had written. In the end, I chose twenty-three pictures by students in all four classes.

Before I could merge the pictures and text, I had to scan each one of the pictures onto a disk. This was not a difficult task once I found a computer lab with a working scanner. With both my text and illustrations in hand, I set out to find a computer with Adobe Photoshop. This may not sound like a difficult task, but it proved to be a challenge. After consulting University Computing Services and finding the first two labs they recommended no longer had the program, I found what I was looking for. I spent four hours rotating images, resizing pages, and retyping text on fifteen pages before my zip disk ran out of space. Fortunately, a friend was nearby to lend me her disk so I could continue working. Two hours, and seven pages, later I saw the light of day again.

The result of my labors was a poetic children’s story that allowed me to include several very special classes of elementary school students in its production. Through this project I was able to expose many of these students to poetry and the individual interpretation that accompanies poetry. I felt that both the children and I benefited from the experience. I have never been as proud of a project as I am of this one.
Bibliography


