

Night at the Capitol

Chapter One

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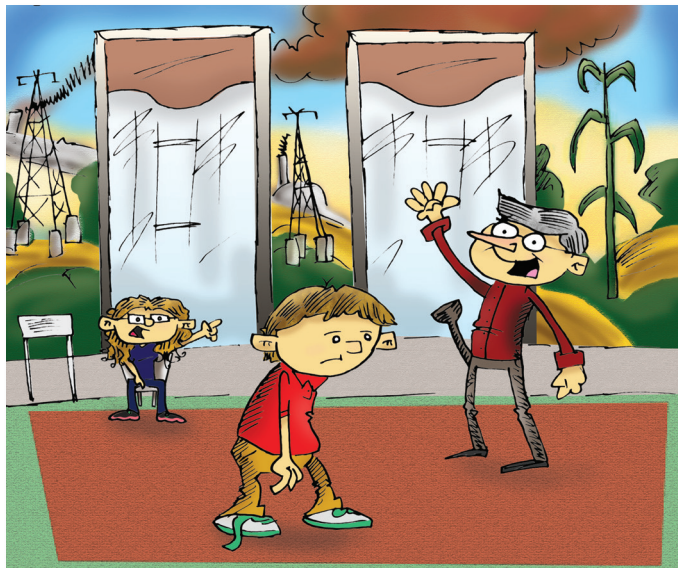
Charlie already knew that this was going to be a very, very boring day. He could tell by the particular way his footsteps echoed against the marble floors as he entered the Missouri Capitol. While he followed his teacher and classmates into the museum, Charlie had one impression of the place; absolutely dull.

Charlie knew he'd been born in Missouri, but he didn't feel like a Missourian. His family had moved to California when he was just a baby and he had grown up with beaches and palm trees. Finding out that they were moving back to Missouri before the start of this school year was without a doubt the worst day in all of Charlie's 11 years. Nothing was more boring than the Midwest. Except possibly this dull, old Capitol squatting in the most boring way possible next to the muddy Missouri River. He scuffed his sneaker against the marble floor of the rotunda and sighed as his teacher began to speak.

"Class, this is Mr. Priddy." Everyone quieted down around him, as Charlie's teacher introduced an old man, with grey hair slicked to the side and silver, wire-rimmed glasses. "Mr. Priddy was a reporter here at the Capitol for many years. He has done quite a bit of research on this building and has kindly agreed to give our class a little tour today. Please, everyone, let's be polite and listen as Mr. Priddy shows us around the Missouri State Museum."

"Good morning class!" Mr.

Priddy boomed, his big voice echoing around the rotunda. "And welcome, welcome to the Missouri State Capitol! To your state capitol!"



Yeah, yeah, thought Charlie. Why do I need to learn about Missouri history anyway? As soon as I'm grown up I'm moving straight back to California where there are movie stars and oceans.

Mr. Priddy began to lead Charlie's class into the museum.

"This exhibit is called Civil War Missouri: A House Dividing," he told the class. "Note that there are depictions of soldiers from both the Union and the Confederate armies. The people of Missouri were deeply divided during the Civil War. Some wanted to belong to the North and some to the South."

Charlie looked around and saw tiny dioramas of soldiers, set up

in war scenes. The minuscule men pointed guns the size of match sticks at one another. In the center of the museum, Charlie saw his classmates trying

on various Civil War era clothing. Two replica soldiers — one from the Union and one a Confederate — stared down on the scene with blank faces. Charlie shivered. Those guys gave him the creeps.

He wandered into the World War wing of the museum. Old, tattered flags were mounted in glass cases. Two more replica soldiers, these from World War I and World War II, lived in this area. Charlie looked closely at their neat and tidy uniforms.

"That uniform belonged to a sailor from Missouri," a voice grumbled from behind him.

Charlie gave a start. He turned around and saw Mr. Priddy.

"His family donated it to the museum," his guide continued.

"Oh," Charlie said, edging away from the tour guide.

"Are you interested in World War II history?" Mr. Priddy asked. "Or how about the pioneer era? There are some pretty neat dioramas across the way. Or maybe natural history? The entire west wing is dedicated to Missouri's unique and wonderful natural resources."

"I'm not really ... history's not exactly my thing," Charlie said.

"Ah, I see," Mr. Priddy answered.

He gave Charlie a long look before moving away to show his classmates a Civil War era cannon. It might have been his imagination, but Charlie thought he saw a small, strange twinkle in the old man's eye.

"Ok, class! Alrighty class!" Mr. Priddy called to his classmates. "We're going to go now to the House Lounge to check out the famous mural by Thomas Hart Benton. Let's go!"

Charlie and his class followed Mr. Priddy up a few flights of stairs and through a large pair of swinging doors. *Whoa*, Charlie thought, as he entered the lounge. The walls were covered in a giant, colorful painting. There were all kinds of people in the painting — Native Americans, river boatmen, folks at a town hall meeting, slaves and slave traders, businessmen, beer brewers, pioneers, outlaws, government representatives — all caught going about their day's business by Benton's

paintbrush. Charlie, bored as he was, couldn't help but be impressed.

"This is the House Lounge," Mr. Priddy said. "It's where the members of Missouri's House of Representatives will sometimes hold meetings. When the muralist, Thomas Hart Benton, painted this mural on these walls he was criticized because it isn't very relaxing now is it? All of these people practically jump out at you, don't they? It's as if the walls are alive."

Charlie might have imagined it, but it seemed like Mr. Priddy was looking right at him as he spoke about the painting coming to life. He thought the old man seemed to still have that mysterious hint of a twinkle in his eye.

Capitol Ideas

In this chapter, there are multiple meaning words. Newspaper headlines sometimes have a dual meaning, too. While you are reading this serial story, look through the newspaper for examples of headlines with dual meaning. Cut and paste your examples to a classroom anchor chart.

Learning Standards: I can read historical fiction to develop fluency and to make text-to-world connections. I can identify vocabulary in context. I can comprehend main idea and supporting details. I can analyze literary techniques and make predictions.

