

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Egypt Game

by  
Zilpha Keatley Snyder

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### Book Information

Zilpha Keatley Snyder, The Egypt Game  
Quiz Number: 217  
Atheneum, 1967  
ISBN 0-440-42225-6; LCCN  
215 Pages  
Book Level: 6.4  
Interest Level: MG

It is only a game for six children, until an oracle tells the truth and a murderer appears.

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books; Newbery Honor

**Topics:** Humor/Funny, Funny; Mysteries, Misc./Other; Power Lessons AR, Grade 6; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

### Main Characters

April Hall a sixth-grade girl from Hollywood who is sent to live with her grandmother in another California town in the Casa Rosada apartment building

Caroline April's grandmother

Dorothea April's mother

Elizabeth Chung a fourth-grade girl who moves into the Casa Rosada apartment building

Ken Kamata a sixth-grade boy in Melanie and April's class

Marshall Ross Melanie's four-year-old brother

Melanie Ross a sixth-grade girl who lives in the Casa Rosada apartment building

Professor an older man who runs an antiques and curios shop next door to the yard the children discovered

Toby Alvillar a sixth-grade boy in Melanie and April's class

### Vocabulary

**alabaster** a compact, fine-textured, usually white and translucent gypsum often carved into objects

**bier** a stand bearing a coffin or corpse

**haughtiness** in a state of being disdainfully proud

**hieroglyphic** a character in a system of picture writing

**monolith** a single great stone often in the form of a monument or column

**oracle** one held to give divinely inspired answers or revelations

**reincarnation** rebirth of a soul in a new body

### Synopsis

April Hall is sent away from her Hollywood home to live with her grandmother while her mother goes on tour. April is not happy with the move but accepts it since she believes it will be only temporary. While living with her grandmother, she becomes friends with a girl her age, Melanie. Melanie and April enjoy some of the same activities including reading and playing "inventing games." One day they discover a hole in a tall fence and enter an abandoned yard. The yard turns out to be the perfect place for their Egypt Game.

The girls invent a series of ceremonies and rituals pertaining to Egypt. Eventually, a new girl moves into the apartment where April and Melanie live and they invite her to join. The group of four, which includes Melanie's little brother, Marshall, play the Egypt Game for awhile until there is news in the neighborhood that a child has been murdered. Out of fear, the parents forbid the children from playing outdoors until the killer is caught. The children must comply, and they attempt to continue the Egypt Game in their apartments, but it is just not the same.

April figures that the group would have a chance to return to their Egypt Game for at least one night by slipping away from the trick-or-treaters on Halloween. The plan goes smoothly until Ken Kamata and Toby Alvillar spy on them and drop in on the group. In order to keep them from tattling, the group offers to let them play the game with them. Surprisingly, they accept the offer and join the group. The enlarged group continues the game by expanding their ceremonies and inventing their own hieroglyphics.

One night, April must return to Egypt to retrieve her

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math book. Since she is babysitting Marshall and he refuses to be left behind, the two head over to the yard. April finds her book, but as she is leaving a man grabs her. Marshall sees this but is unable to get the words out to yell for help. The old man who owns the yard and often watches the group play witnesses the attack and yells for help. Marshall later identifies the attacker, who then confesses to killing other children. The old man, the Professor, is happy to help and grateful he is no longer suspected of being the killer. He boards up the hole in his fence but gives the children keys to the gate. As the story ends, it appears the group will move on to a new game, and April has accepted that her home is with her grandmother.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Why didn't the children continue the Egypt Game after Christmas?

*They thought it had run its course. It couldn't be as exciting as it had been. It was no longer a secret.*

### Literary Analysis

How did April change throughout the course of the story?

*She let down her guard. She stopped wearing the false eyelashes and her mother's old fur. She made friends with kids her own age. She realized Caroline loved her and cared about her.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Sometimes a first impression of a person can be right, and sometimes it can be wrong. Have the students list some of the first impressions the characters had of one another. Discuss whether these turned out to be accurate or not.

*April was sure she wouldn't like Melanie, but they became great friends. Most people thought the Professor was mean, but he was very kind. April and Melanie did not want to befriend Elizabeth, but they became protective of her. The girls thought the boys would make fun of their game, but they enjoyed playing it.*

### Constructing Meaning

Why was April stand-offish at the beginning of the story?

*She felt abandoned by her mother. She didn't get along with most children her own age. She didn't really know Caroline very well. She didn't expect to be staying at the Casa Rosada very long.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Each character in the story identified with an Egyptian from the past. They created costumes to enhance the realism of the game. Have students choose a character from the story and re-create the costume the character wore, or might have worn, during the Egypt Game.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Have students research Egyptian gods and goddesses. Have them choose one that was mentioned in the story, (Nefertiti, Isis, Bastet, Set, etc.) and write a short paper on their findings. Have them draw a picture of what they think the god or goddess may have looked like.

**Comparing and Contrasting** When April and Melanie first met, Melanie figured that April's strange behavior and style of dress must have been common in Hollywood. Often when a person moves or travels from one part of a state or country to another, there are things about them

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that seem strange to the local people. Have the class discuss some of the differences between lifestyle, dress, language, etc. that exist in the different parts of the United States. Have them share experiences they have had when they seemed out of place in a new town or times when they have met a person from a different area and what things seemed different about them.

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning** Melanie had a creative way of entertaining herself before she met April. She would cut pictures of people out of magazines and create families. Then she would make up stories about the members of the families. This activity helped her become a very creative person. Have your students do something similar by cutting out magazine pictures. To help get them started, allow them to make up oral stories and as they progress ask the students to write down their stories.