

The Society of Super Secret Heroes
"The Great Cape Rescue"
Phyllis Shalant
Penguin Group
Dutton's Children's Books
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Laura McWilliams

About the Author:

www.phyllisshalant.com

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1949, Shalant's journey toward becoming a writer started prior to reading or writing. Long before she became an author, Phyllis Shalant spent her childhood days having her stuffed animals and dolls act out her stories. By the time she was in the 4th grade she was writing so many stories her teacher predicted she would become an author. After high school Shalant headed to Berkley then returned to New York after graduation to become a teacher. After teaching, copy writing, and newspaper reporting, Shalant followed her heart and started writing children's stories. Many of the stories she writes are from real life experiences. An example of this would be "Bartleby" a pet turtle she had as a child. For now, Shalant continues writing children's stories, doing author talks, and teaching writing children's literature at Manhattanville College. Shalant is currently working on her new series "The Society of Super Secret Heroes".

The author resides in New York with her husband, a golden retriever, Bartleby the turtle. She has two grown daughters as well.

Annotation:

Phyllis Shalant engages the reader in a realistic tale of courage, friendship, and adventure. Fourth grade Kevin, who is called Finch, and his three best friends love to imagine being superheroes, but feel that due to their age they have to keep it a secret. Finch's homemade cape, that he got at a garage sale when he was five, suddenly becomes magical and opens a whole new door of adventure for them. The boys decide to write an "oath" to help others and do good in their "super secret heroes society." The author's writing style is sincere. This is seen as Finch aims to help his sister get her best friend back, stops bullies, make the new teacher feel welcome and protect the classroom pets. Finch is a very empathic character who loves to help make people happy and feel wanted. He helps his sister get her best friend back and his teacher, who is new at his school, feel welcome by throwing him a surprise birthday party.

The story is magical. Finch can converse with his cape through his mind. The cape responds and leads Finch and his buddies to believe it's magical. The cape claims to be a "Thinking Cape" and begins telling them tales of his past "masters" from decades ago and giving the boys suggestions on how to handle problems. These tales told by the cape of bravery, magic, and courage soon have Finch feeling more confident about himself. Finch builds a friendship with the cape and empathizes with its feelings. Examples of this are Finch riding bike with the cape on to give it the feeling of fresh air and taking the cape up to his platform in the tree and reading stories aloud to it.

The story is realistic and stresses the importance of family relationships. Finch's parents are recently divorced and his father is remarried. His father also has a new baby named Jake. Finch shows feelings of anger and confusion due to the changes in his family. He isn't very friendly to his father and feels he is unimportant now that the baby is here. His negative feelings toward him are discouraged by the cape. The cape tells him to be nice and give him a second chance. The relationship between them improves when he confides in his father about the "thinking cape" and sees that he is interested. He then turns to his father for help when the cape is damaged.

Readers learn that the cape is not magical and that believing in yourself is what's important. Finch realizes that standing up to the bullies, and helping people was done on his own with a little encouragement from the cape.

This story also shows how divorce and growing up affects children. These changes in life can make a child feel angry, confused and not wanted. Children need to feel loved and for someone to take time for them. Finch felt his father did not have time for him, but he felt that the "Thinking cape" was there to listen, give advice, and be a friend.

Genre: fantasy / friendship

Point of view: The point of view is third person omniscient.

Theme: Believe in yourself

Conflict: The main conflict in this story is the Society of Super Secret Heroes against Thorn and Bud, the bullies. Another conflict is Finch against his dad.

Conflict Resolution:

The conflict is resolved when Finch confronts Thorn and Bud and gets the "Thinking Cape" back. The other resolution is when Finch begins to accept his dad and his new family. His dad begins to make time for just the two of them.

Characters:

- **Finch Mundy** - Fourth grade boy who is skinny with curly, dark hair and ears that stick out. He is the owner of the "Thinking Cape." Parents are divorced and dad is remarried with new baby. He loves helping people and animals. Owns two ferrets: Cubby and Rose.
- **Rajiv Shah** - One of Finch's friends who is in the Society of Super Secret Heroes. He wears glasses, loves magic and is in fourth grade. He has four year old twin siblings, Meena and Sonny that he helps watch.
- **Kevin Chan** - Another member of the Society of Super Secret Heroes. He is also in fourth grade and is an artist.
- **Elliot Levensen** - Another member of the Society of Super Secret Heroes. He is in fourth grade and is adopted. He lives in an apartment with his mom and dog, Peewee. He likes to tell jokes, do cartoon imitations, and act.
- **Mimi** - Finch's sister who is in seventh grade.
- **Elaine Mundy** - Finch's mom that's a successful insurance saleswoman. A tall, skinny lady with brown long hair. She is allergic to dogs and divorced.
- **Pete Mundy** - Finch's dad who is a prosthetist. He has curly, dark hair. Recently remarried with a baby boy Jake.
- **Slope Burns** - Finch's teacher. Just moved from California and it's his first year teaching. He's a redhead that enjoys

yoga, animals, music and blowing his bugle to get everyone's attention.

- **Norman Rosebud** - One of the bullies in Finch's class, also known as "Bud." He is bossy and calls Finch "Towelman."
- **Irwin Thornton** - One of the bullies in Finch's class, also known as "Thorn."
- **Chloe / Kayla / Zoe** - Brainiac girls in Finch's class.
- **Phillip & Anthony** - The class hermit crabs.
- **The Thinking Cape** - A jewel green beach towel with green satin strings and yellow lightning bolts.

Setting:

This story takes place in modern times mainly at Finch's school and his home.

Interest Level:

- 4th - 5th grade

Reading Level:

- 9 - 12 yrs

Booktalk:

What if you discovered that something you had owned for years suddenly had superpowers? That is what happened to a fourth grade boy named Finch. Finch and his three best buddies love pretending to be superheroes and running around in their capes. But now that they are going into the fourth grade they feel like maybe they are getting too old, so they try to keep this a secret from others.

Finch has a cape that his mom got for him at a garage sale when he was in kindergarten. It is actually a cotton towel made into a

cape with a lightning bolt on it. Finch has always loved this cape and sometimes sleeps with it under his pillow.

One day Finch and his friends are talking about superpowers and discussing their comic "Superferrets" when his friend Elliott drags the cape out of the closet. Finch thinks he is crazy when he hears the cape complain about getting dragged on the floor.

Finch then throws the cape back into the closet claiming that he didn't know he still had it. Later, in private, Finch gets the cape out of the closet and ties it around his neck. He decides to write an oath which states, "I promise to do my best to help others at all times, to fight only for truth and justice, never for selfish or evil ends, but to solve problems by thinking, not fighting, whenever I can." Once the oath is complete and cape tied around his neck the "Thinking cape" begins to call him "master."

Finch tells his buddies about the cape and they decide to call themselves the "Society of Super Secret Heroes." The cape tells the boys he can help them become superheroes. The boys all sign their names on the oath and are now able to hear the capes thoughts in their heads. The cape tells them how his life began and stories of his old master from years ago.

Finch can only hear the capes thoughts if it is with him, so he has to take it everywhere. The cape is kept hidden in his backpack. Finch believes that the cape is helping him solve all his problems, and he trusts everything he says. Then it happened. The cape is gone from Finch's backpack. Finch begins to panic while questions fill his head. Where could it be? Did someone steal it from his bag? Finch realizes that he cannot be or superhero without the cape...or can he?

In order to find out what happened to the "Thinking cape", get to your nearest library and check out "The Society of Super Secret Heroes" yourself.

Vocabulary:

Composition - (pg24) the combining of parts or elements to form a whole.

Bugle - (pg23) a brass wind instrument somewhat shorter than a trumpet and lacking keys or valves.

Retorted - (pg23) to reply, especially to answer in a quick or witty manner.

Prosthetist - (pg 40) one who makes artificial arms and legs.

Oath - (pg64) promise to fulfill a pledge.

Preposterous - (pg76) Contrary to nature, reason, or common sense.

Carcass - (pg129) the dead body of an animal, especially one slaughtered for food.

Admonished - (pg211) to remind of something forgotten or disregarded, as an obligation or a responsibility.

Procession - (pg220) the act of moving along or forward.

Indiana Academic Standards met:

Language Arts / Reading: 4.1 / 4.3 / 5.1 /5.3

Science / Living Environment: 4.4 / 5.4

Anticipation Statements:

Before		Statement	After	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		1. Hermit crabs can switch shells.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		2. The only way to solve problems is to fight.		
		3. All capes have superpowers.		
		4. By fourth grade you should be done playing "pretend."		
		5. Good friends are always there for each other.		
		6. Yoga helps clear the mind.		
		7. An oath is a promise to fulfill.		

Read Alouds:

Read aloud #1: "Fin's Secret" - Pg.15 "I am here, Master."

Importance of passage:

This one sentence is one of the most important lines in the story. The reader is drawn in to continue reading because the cape is not only talking to Finch, but calling him Master. The reader will want to know why the cape is suddenly talking and what is going to happen to Finch now that he is a "master."

Read aloud #2: "Vanished" - Pg.183

"Hey, Cape, is everything okay?" he asked silently. He waited and listened in his head. The Thinking Cape didn't reply. He unzipped his pack just enough to slip a hand inside. "Ahh!" Finch gasped, very much out loud."

Importance of passage:

The importance of this passage is Finch discovers that the Cape is missing. Finch has been relying on the cape to solve all of his problems and just when he really needs it, it's gone. The only ones who know about the cape are Finch and his three buddies. He is visibly upset when he realizes the cape is not in his backpack. Will he tell others who heard him "gasp" what is wrong? Will he tell his buddies he has lost the cape or keep it a secret?