The Shakespeare Stealer
By Gary Blackwood
Discussion Guide

1. Tell a little about Widge and his life.
Widge was born in 1757 and lived in an orphanage with Mistress MacGregor. He was basically neglected at the orphanage. They had more to eat when someone was charitable. He went to live with Dr. Timothy Bright who taught him English and Latin and a shorthand Dr. Bright invented. Widge was often sent to copy down the sermons of other rectors (preachers) for Dr. Bright, beginning when he turned 12. The sermon stealing was eventually discovered.

2. What does Widge think about right and wrong?
Widge thinks that Right was what benefited you, and anything which did you harm was Wrong. Discuss why he would come up with that conclusion.

3. Why did Widge continue to steal sermons once he discovered that was what he was doing?
He was the property of Dr. Bright by law. He was to do as told.

4. Why didn’t he run away or get a job or go home?
He thought about running away but felt he didn't have enough survival skills (probably meaning "street smarts") to do well. He was property so could not get a job and there was no home to return to.

CHAPTER 2
5. What does Widge mean when he says the grand climateric struck again? His fortune changed again but it was for a worse situation. A very strange man came and took him to a new life. Widge had to show he knew the shorthand language, which finally Dr. Bright admitted Widge knew well. Dr. Bright accepted 10 gold sovereigns in exchange for Widge.

6. What did Widge own to take with to the new life?
All Widge owned was a small dagger for eating, a linen tunic, and woolen stockings for the Sabbath, a worn leather wallet with birthday money, and a hand-me-down garment.

7. Why did Widge feel fortunate with so few possessions to his name?
His orphanage friends of unsound mind or body were still there, and others were already dead.

CHAPTER THREE
8. Did Widge know where he was being taken by the evil looking stranger who had just purchased him?
No, and he had not been out of Berwick before. He only knew the direction to London
and that it was five days travel to get there. He didn't think that was where they were going.

9. What was the journey like?  
Widge had a difficult time walking as fast as the horse, he cut his foot, finally the stranger pulled him up on the horse but did not want to be touched, they were almost robbed and the stranger beat up the would be robbers, whenever Widge spoke he was told not to speak unless spoken to.

10. What did it mean that the bandits were in “various attitudes and degrees of unconsciousness”?  
It meant the stranger had beaten them all up but they were not dead.

11. Why did the stranger toss one coin at the leader of the bandits?  
To be rude and have the last word.

CHAPTER FOUR
1. How did Widge feel while traveling the next day?  
He was very weak and ached fiercely.

2. Where were they when they stopped traveling?  
They were in Leicester, not London.

3. What was the stable boy doing that was wrong when the stranger reached the house?  
The stable boy was not to be in the kitchen.

4. What did it mean that Widge “hailed” from Berwick-in-Elmet?  
That’s where he was from.

5. What words was Widge using that showed he was not from the area (and probably low class)? What did they mean? wis and aye wis meant something like “think” and aye meant yes

6. Where was Widge to sleep? What does it mean? In the garret or attic.

7. How long did Widge get to sleep? What was his first meal? What did he discover was missing?  
He was allowed to sleep as long as he wanted (noon maybe?) and the first meal was cold meat and potatoes from the night before. His wallet was missing and he knew the stable boy had taken it but he knew better than to mention it.

8. What sign did Widge make to show Libby he would not tell the master that she thought he was weird? The sign of the cross.
9. Who was the new master? Was it the stranger? The new master’s name was Simon Bass and he was not the stranger.

CHAPTER FIVE
10. What is the stranger’s name? Falconer

11. What was the job Widge was to do? Where was the job? What does surreptitious mean? The job Widge was to do was to write Shakespeare’s play: THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK in character. He would see the play in London, chaperoned by Falconer. Surreptitious means very carefully so as to be unseen (look up this word).

12. Although Widge had not recovered from the first trip, he found a way to ride (on a horse for himself this trip) that was not too uncomfortable. What was this? He shortened his stirrups and would lean back in the saddle.

13. What was Widge expecting London to be like? The center of the universe and like the Heavenly City.

14. A rabbit ran across Widge’s path. He thought it was a bad omen, did Falconer also think so? Falconer thought that men make their own fates.

15. What did Widge mean “not prentices?” Widge meant he felt apprentices were not in charge of their own fate/luck.

16. When they reached London two days later, and had to walk their horses within the walls of the city, what did Widge step into? He stepped into the sewer. Falconer wanted him to “walk downwind” of him so he wouldn’t have to smell the odor.

17. What does “green” mean? New to something and not used to it; maybe laughable like stepping in the sewer.

18. When was the play? Had Widge ever seen a play before? They had to wait 3 days for the play, and Widge had never seen a play before. He could not get all the words down the first time. He didn’t know what language it was in and he could not ask Falconer questions. He was nervous.

19. What was the house boarded up with the words “LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US?” Widge thought it was a church, but it was a house where people had the plague.

20. What did Widge have to ride in to get to the Globe Theatre? A boat and he had never been in one before. He fell overboard after throwing up.

21. Did Falconer feel he saved Widge’s life? No, he thought he saved his master’s investment.
22. How much did it cost to go in to see the play? A penny, and Widge had to go in alone.

23. How does the author describe the sounds and smell in the theatre? “The roar of voices and the smell of closely packed bodies was overpowering and unremitting.”

24. What does Widge think that shows how difficult it was to write every word while being caught up in the play? “I began to think of these people not as players mouthing speeches but as actual persons living out a part of their lives before me.”

“My petty mission no longer seemed to matter. All that mattered was whether or not Hamlet would take action to avenge his father. I wanted to call out to him, to tell him to stop delaying debating, to go ahead and do what must be done.” (there are more possible answers)

25. Did he think of the entire cast as men players? No, he was totally convinced that the Queen and Ophelia were what they seemed to be. In fact, Ophelia was quite fetching!

26. When every single word was not written down, what did Widge feel like? A toothless bear waiting to be savaged by the dogs.

CHAPTER 8

27. What did Widge tell Falconer? That he missed about 50 lines How long did they have to wait for the second showing of the play? a week, until the next Friday

28. Leaving the play, who did Falconer fight and did he finish the fight? Falconer fought with the first grave digger in the play, and let him free. Widge stayed a minute and told the name of his master. The player thought Dr. Bright was the author of THE TREATISE ON MALANCHOLY that Shakespeare used when writing Hamlet.

29. When Widge found Falconer, what did he say he told to the player? Naught (or nothing) which wasn’t quite true.

30. Why did they lose their lodgings? Falconer killed one of the lodgers in a duel because the man had called him a Jew.

31. Falconer made Widge climb near the players entrance. Widge was very nervous and tried not to watch the play and tried to get every word.

32. Widge heard footsteps coming close to him. A player noticed Widge. The audience saw Widge and was laughing. Widge got free and tried to run, but was trapped. He yelled “Fire! Fire!” Everyone left the theatre. There was an actual fire. The players were helping to put it out. Rain fell and saved the day. Widge also lost the table book.

CHAPTER 10

33. Why did Widge return to the theatre? It was better than facing Falconer with no script. He ran into the grave digger. He let the player help him. Others noticed Widge was caught.

34. What is the classic mistake of all criminals? Returning to the scene of the crime.

35. What did Widge tell the players to escape being punished? That he had no master, came to London by himself, all to be an actor. The players voted him into the company after discussion about the possibility of his lying.
36. Did Widge MEAN to become an actor at this point? No, he only intended to get the script and give it back to Dr. Bright.
37. Does Widge think Dr. Bright will come and look for him? No, because he is the former master and has been paid. Simon Bass would look for him but the players don’t have that name, just the former master’s name.
38. What do the other players tell Widge? (stories of how they became players)
39. When could Widge become a hired man? When his voice changed if he was good.
40. What sounds does Widge hear? Beatings, which tell him the theatre is as harsh as any other institution.
41. Just when Widge was thinking of returning to Falconer, Sander took him into the room with the sounds and Widge found it was playacting. What did the stage manager have Widge do first? He had Widge repeat what he said and duplicate stance and movements with a singlestick weapon. Widge grew tired rapidly.
42. When the others made fun of him, what did he want to do? Could he? He wanted to show them what he could do with a pen but it would have given himself away. Widge still planned to steal the script at this point and return to Falconer and Simon Bass.
43. Who would be the coaches for Widge? Julian (Ophelia) and Sander. They teach him how to use the singlestick (the wards on page 85).
44. What does Nick tell Widge his name means where he comes from? A horse. He later calls Widge a Hobby horse and says he will hobble on him.
45. Why didn’t Mr. Armin stop the fighting with Julian, Nice, Sander and Widge? He thinks men should fight their own battles.
46. What is bothering Nick? That he needs to begin playing men on stage. Also he drinks and gambles and is late to performances and practices.
47. What was the next job for Widge? To help actors change costumes for the play Every Man Out of His Humour.
48. Why did Widge try to find the lost script? If he didn’t find it, someone else would. Then he looked in the balcony and realized his wallet had been stolen for money but the thief only found a script that would be useless to anyone.
49. Who guarded the one script of Hamlet? Sander. Widge couldn’t think of a way to write the script without being seen, or to be able to use the one script Sander guarded.
50. Where did Sander take Widge on Sunday after church? What happened? St. Paul’s “the center of things.” They went up the tower and enjoyed the view. At the market Widge found many books by “Wm. Shaksper.” Then Widge saw Falconer. Widge walked through a graveyard to escape Falconer.
51. When Widge was lost, what travel advice did the farmer give him? Turn left at the next chance and follow your nose ‘til you wets your toes.
52. What did the two robbers with a dagger say they wanted from Widge? The clothes on his back. (or his ears)

CHAPTER 14
53. Who was calling Widge? Julian was there with a man, Hugh. How did he escape the robbers? They knew Julian had friends who could cut off THEIR ears.
54. Where were they? Alsatia, a very, very poor neighborhood. Julian is going back to where he stays with Mr. Phillips and his wife.

55. When Widge found out players would be paid, and Julian said he would be an actor for nothing, Widge asked him why. Discuss. It was difficult for Widge to imagine wanting to act so badly he would do anything to act. He did not know why anyone would long for something they could not have.

56. At Mr. Pope’s, Widge sees Sander again. Sander says he can keep a secret. Does Widge tell him anything? No, and he returned to dinner after everyone had eaten so the Mistress Willingson gave him some food she kept warm for him.

57. How does Widge sleep? Not well, he dreams of Falconer.

58. When Widge is whitewashing the roof, who does he drop his paintbrush on? Mr. Shakespeare. What does Mr. Shakespeare tell Widge to learn to do? Laugh. Discuss why Widge would need to learn to laugh.

CHAPTER 15

59. Nick was gone. Sander had to play his part. Who had to read lines in case the actors forgot? Who could take the book out of the theater and walk away? Widge.

60. Sander needed help, and it irritated Widge as he was deciding what to do, walk out with the script or stay and help his new friends. Widge suddenly had to help when the king forgot his lines. Widge helped. He enjoyed it. Nick returned and fought Sander for his costume. Sander hit is head on the door. Widge hit Nick with the script book. Mr. Armin sent Nick home. What did his praise do for Widge? The small amount of praise was so wonderful for Widge who was so unaccustomed to it that he wanted to continue helping with lines.

61. Jack took the book from Widge, and then Widge lost his opportunity to give the book to Falconer. He knew Falconer would not give him what? PRAISE.

CHAPTER 16

62. Mr. Shakespeare was dressed in armor and said he had feared Widge had let the book fall into hell. What did he mean? He meant the cellar beneath the stage.

63. When Widge says, “I ken that.” What does he mean? I knew that.

64. Mr. Shakespeare asked Widge, “Do you have nothing better to do that lounge about in the tiring room?” and he left the room. The other actors said he was melancholy and has a touch of genius. Widge asks why everyone frets about the book, and of course, the others answer the book can be stolen by other theater companies. They mention whom? Simon Bass. ALSO DISCUSS the top of page 118 about Jewish people.

65. The longer Widge was with the company and couldn’t have the book, the less he felt he owed Falconer. He knew a master’s promise to a prentice was likely to be redeemed never. He was treated as an intelligent person, and got a small part in a play “The Spanish Tragedy.” He was so worried he dreamed he acted how? Naked.

66. On the way to the theater, he was dragged to the side of the road and flung on his back on the grass. It was Falconer.

CHAPTER 17
67. Falconer uses a dagger and tells Widge he has to give him the playbook tonight. Widge gets to the theater and Sander realizes he is upset. How does Widge cover up what is really going on? He says he has been running too hard.

68. The actors teach him how to use “false” swords that collapse. They didn’t tell him at first so as not to miss the look on his face. Widge shows he knows how to do what well in acting? He show them he can be dramatic about pretending to die.

69. Julian and Widge talk. They don’t have family. Julian’s father is paid a small sum yearly for him to be an actor. Is Widge very nervous about his three lines? Yes, and he practices them over and over and doesn’t remember saying them on stage.

Chapter 18

70. Widge stays in the property room all night. Use uses a helmet for a toilet. He finds “body parts” in trunks. He doesn’t find the script. He stays all night and lies to Mr. Pope in the morning. What does he say?

71. He asks why they don’t fire Nick, and is impressed with what about the theater? It is like a family and they look out for one another.

Chapter 19

72. Mr. Hemminges wanted to see Nick in the property room. Widge thinks it is about the night he stayed there, but it wasn’t. What was it about?

73. He ends up feeling like he is around people who care about him and it is a new feeling. To keep these people safe and not endanger them, he does what? (stay close to Mr. Pope’s or the theater)

74. Julian suggests many times he knows that Widge has secrets. Widge does not tell Julian but Julian understands. There is a fight (discuss).

75. Widge lets a few people see he can write in character. Why was this not a good thing to share? Julian and Sander agree to keep this secret to keep Widge from having to do more work.

Chapter 20

Julian, Nick and Widge discuss why Mr. Shakespeare might be sad. What are their guesses?

Why won’t Julian wrestle? (she is a girl, later we learn)
Later they prepare to be in a play at the castle. Why are they so careful and worried?
What does the fight with Nick and Julian reveal?

Chapter 21

They go to find Nick in a bar, and Nick is drinking with university students who fight him and almost kill him. Widge knows Nick is alive and no artery has been cut from working with Dr. Bright.
Thank you for downloading my lesson! This is my complete file on THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER book.

FREE links to my other TpT lessons from my Facebook page:
http://www.facebook.com/WiseOwlFactory

My Book a Day Blog, with links to free lessons, free plays, materials, and resources:
http://www.wiseowlfactory.com/BookaDay/

My lessons store on Teachers Pay Teachers with free and priced lessons:
http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Wise-Owl-Factory/Products

My free website with lessons, including Grade 1 Everyday Math, semester 2:
http://www.thewisewisewolfactory.com
My author page on Readwritethink.org:
http://www.readwritethink.org/about/bio/carolyn-wilhelm-157.html

My Sqworl with more links:  http://sqworl.com/i5z6up
He had had a nice, good, time, plenty of company and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it. Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it, namely, that in order to make a man or a boy want something, it is only necessary to make it difficult to obtain. Chapter III. Tom came to the living-room which was their bedroom, breakfast-room, dining-room, and library at the same time. Aunt Polly was sitting by an open window. She was sure that Tom had left long ago, and she was surprised at seeing him.