

Jinx

Digital Detective

by Tiffany Ard • illustrated by Alessia Trunfio

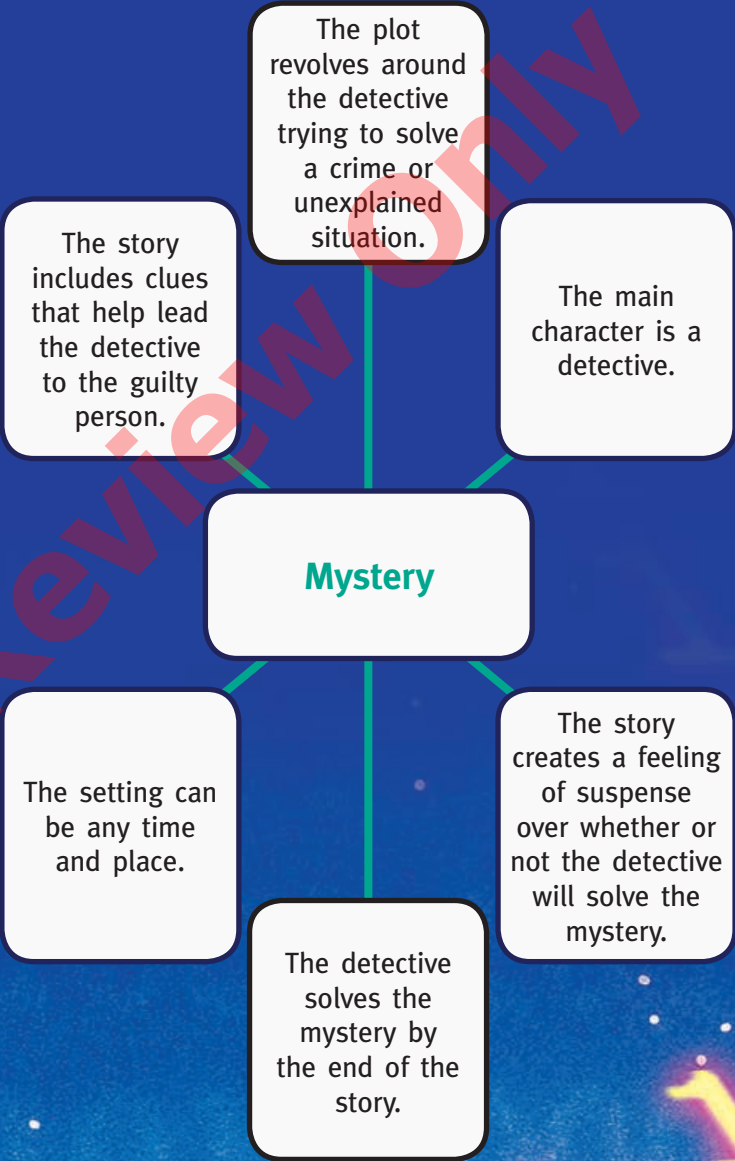


MYSTERY
LITERATURE

Level	S/40
Lexile®	650L

Mystery

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Tech Support

Jinx put her head on her desk. She was always the first to finish math tests and had to be patient while the rest of the class worked. She could hear her teacher, Mr. Hilbert, typing on the classroom computer. He paused, then tapped the keyboard much harder.

Then he whispered, “Jennifer, can you come here a moment?”

Jinx smiled. Teachers always called on her for help with computers. Fixing computers was fun, like solving a puzzle.



She strolled over to the computer and stared. “What is that?” she blurted, forgetting to whisper. Bright green lines streaked down the screen like a neon waterfall.

“Virus?” her teacher guessed.

“Maybe, but if so, it’s a weird one.”

Jinx sat down and rebooted the computer, then ran a virus scan. No viruses. Everything seemed okay.

“Looks like you fixed it. Thanks!” said Mr. Hilbert, looking relieved.

As Jinx got up, a flickering line appeared again at the top of the screen. The line cascaded downward, until the entire screen was covered in vertical lines again.

“It almost looks as if there are letters in there,” Mr. Hilbert pointed out, as they both stared at the lines moving down the screen. “But it’s going so fast that it’s hard to tell.”

Jinx tapped the space bar—then tapped it again and again. The racing lines slowed down, but Jinx still couldn’t read them.

“I have an idea,” Jinx said, pulling out her phone and snapping a photograph of the screen.

She and Mr. Hilbert studied the image. “Why, it looks like Egyptian hieroglyphics,” Mr. Hilbert said, “except for those blocks of Ls and Os.”

Jinx shook her head. “Those aren’t Ls and Os; they’re ones and zeros,” she declared with certainty. “They are strings of binary code!”



Suddenly, the bell rang. Mr. Hilbert started collecting the math tests, and the class emptied out. It was time for recess, but Jinx asked if she could stay back. She wanted to help figure out the puzzle on the screen.

“Binary is a computer code,” Mr. Hilbert said, “but hieroglyphics is a form of ancient writing. Why would binary code and hieroglyphics be mixed together? Should I call Ms. Velasquez from the computer lab to come take a look?”

Jinx sighed. “Probably so. There must be some kind of program running on your computer or ... something. Honestly, I’ve never seen anything like this.”

Mr. Hilbert went to make the call. Jinx grabbed her phone from her desk and went to her favorite website, CodesandCiphers.com.

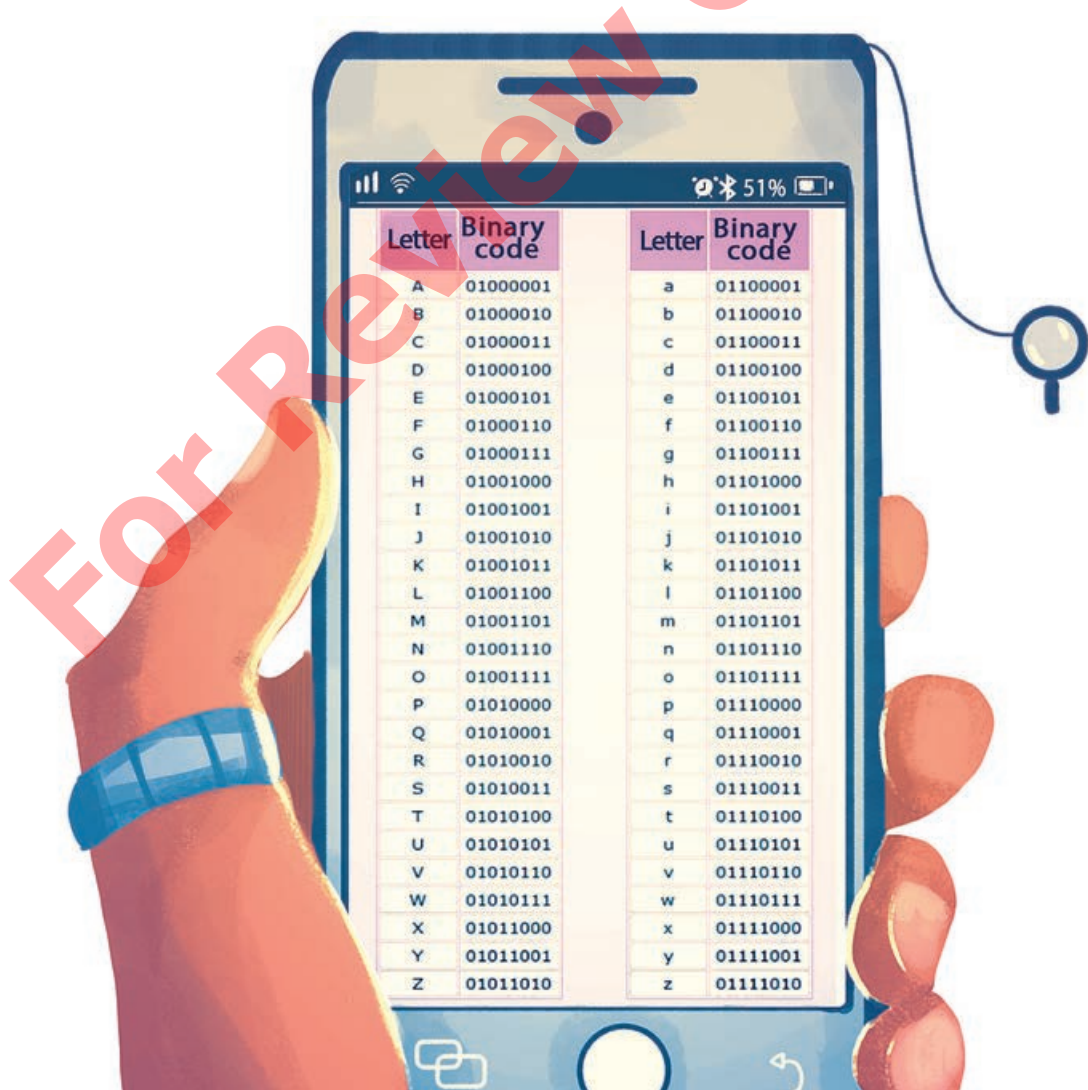
She started to scroll through the website, looking for something that was similar to what was on Mr. Hilbert’s computer.

Then Jinx noticed the first two binary strings were 01001000 and 01000101.

She flipped to a chart of the binary alphabet.

H, E. *He*? She thought. *Who is HE?*

“Hello.” Jinx looked up to see Ms. Velasquez, the computer teacher, waving to Mr. Hilbert as she entered the room. When she bent down to look at the monitor, she gasped. “What on *earth*?”



“Jinx ran a virus scan,” Mr. Hilbert explained in a hushed voice, “and didn’t find anything.”

“So strange,” Ms. Velasquez said. She tried rebooting the computer again. It seemed to help, but only for a minute. “Hmmm. Did you recently install new software?”

Mr. Hilbert shook his head. He motioned for Jinx to come join their conversation. “Jennifer, can you show Ms. Velasquez the picture you took?”

Jinx walked over holding out her phone, and Ms. Velasquez rolled her eyes when she saw the photo on the screen. “It looks like binary code mixed with nonsense!” Ms. Velasquez declared. “Some kid is trying to be a hacker.”

“I’m working to crack the binary code,” Jinx explained.

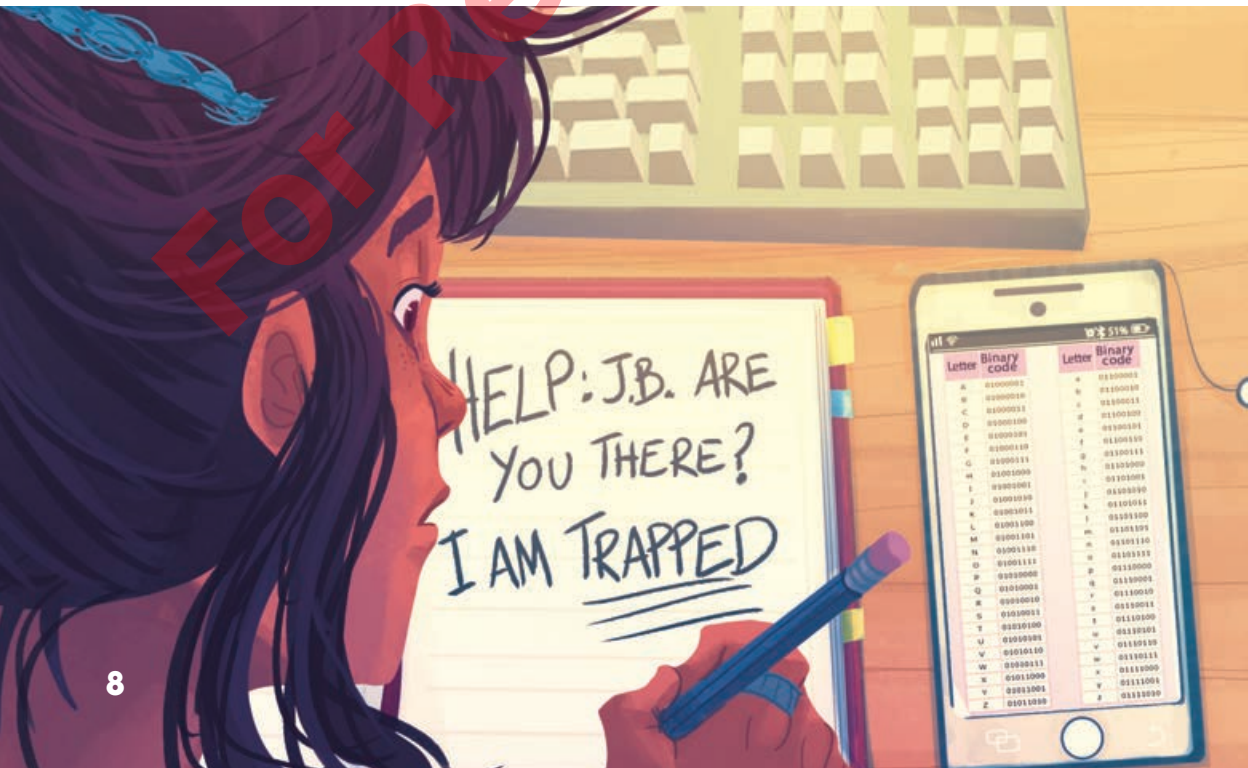
Ms. Velasquez snorted. “It probably says: HEY, I BROKE YOUR SECURITY.”

Jinx was quiet. The first two letters were H and E. She decided not to say anything until she had completed decoding the rest.

Ms. Velasquez grumbled as she tried a few more things. When nothing worked, she said, “I’m going back to my classroom to grab a backup hard drive. Don’t turn this off. If it is a hacker, we want to stay connected long enough to figure out where the messages are coming from.”

Jinx started working more on decoding the binary message. The next two binary strings were 01001100 and 01010000—L and P. Jinx’s heart started beating faster. H-E-L-P.

She worked as fast as she could, decoding the rest of the binary code. Finally, the decoded message read: “HELP: J.B. ARE YOU THERE? I AM TRAPPED.”





Jane Badsome

“Mr. Hilbert, isn’t the history teacher, Mr. Blinkman, really into ancient Egypt? I’m wondering if he might possibly know how to read hieroglyphics.”

“Well, his car has a bumper sticker with the ancient Egyptian symbol of the eye of Horus,” Mr. Hilbert said. “So I’d say he might know a thing or two about hieroglyphics. Good thinking.”

Jinx walked down the hallway looking for Mr. Blinkman’s room. She spotted a door decorated with brown paper and gold symbols. She peeked inside. The walls were covered with posters of pyramids and regal-looking people with animal heads.