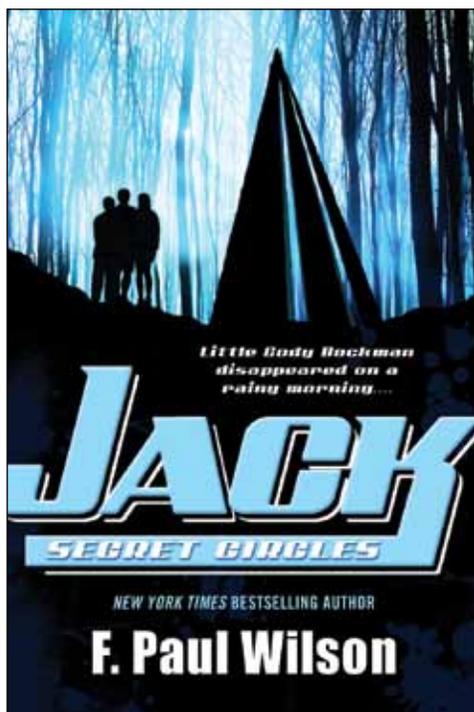




F. Paul Wilson

Jack: Secret Circles



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“Wilson deftly keeps interest high with well-drawn characterizations, modulating the thrills with details of day-to-day life in the early 1980s. Cracking good fun for teens.”

—*KIRKUS REVIEWS ON JACK: SECRET HISTORIES*

“This is a fun and exciting read that will appeal to all audiences. It is a must have for any library. It is a great book for general entertainment, and it will take many adults on a nostalgic journey to their teen years.”

—*CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ON JACK: SECRET HISTORIES*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo: Jerry Bauer

F. PAUL WILSON, the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Repairman Jack novels, lives in Wall, New Jersey.

ABOUT THE BOOK

When his five-year-old neighbor goes missing, Jack can't help feeling responsible. He should have taken Cody home when he found him riding his bicycle near the New Jersey Pine Barrens. And then a lost man wanders out of the woods after being chased all night by...something. Jack knows, better than anyone, that the Barrens are dangerous—a true wilderness filled with people, creatures, and objects lost from sight and memory. Like the ancient, fifteen-foot-tall stone pyramid he, Weezy, and Eddie discover. Jack thinks it might have been a cage of some sort, but for what kind of animal, he can't say. Eddie jokes that it could have been used for the Jersey Devil. Jack doesn't believe in that old folk tale, but something is roaming the Pines. Could it have Cody? And what about the strange circus that set up outside town? Could they be involved? So many possibilities, so little time....

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

* The information, activities, and discussion questions which follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Jack: Secret Circles*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

I. STRANGE PHENOMENA

- A. What is lurking in the New Jersey Pine Barrens? Go to the library or online to find a definition of cryptozoology. With friends or classmates, make a list of creatures that might be subjects of cryptozoological

examination, such as the Sasquatch. Individually or in small groups, research, prepare, and present an oral report on one creature, concluding with your thoughts on whether it might be related to the being described in *Secret Circles*.

B. From the viewpoint of Cody or another character, write a new chapter for the novel in which you describe your first encounter with the mysterious creature. Where are you when the encounter begins? What do you see, hear, smell, and experience when you meet the creature? How does the encounter end?

C. Rain, thunder, and lightning create a chilling atmosphere for the events of *Secret Circles*. Images of flooding water fill the text. Use pencils, watercolor paints, or pens to draw a stormy landscape scene inspired by a scene from the book.

D. Learn more about weird and extreme weather, such as wave clouds, aurora borealis, and giant hailstorms. Interview classmates about their experiences with unusual weather events. Write a newspaper article about unusual weather in your town or state, including quotes from classmates or community members.

E. What is the strangest object you have ever seen or the most unusual experience you have ever had? Write a short essay or story describing this, beginning with the phrase “I would never have imagined....”

II. ACTUATORS AND SEARCHERS

A. Mr. Drexler’s business card describes him as an “actuator.” Go online to find a dictionary definition for this term and to learn about mechanical actuators and who makes and uses them. Use this information to begin a role-play conversation between Jack and Weezy in which you brainstorm what having a business card title of “actuator” might mean and how this might relate to the Septimus Order.

B. Weezy tells Jack that she was the happiest she has ever been when she had the pyramid. In the character of Weezy, write a journal entry describing the importance of the pyramid, why it made you happy, how you feel to have lost it, and how its loss has affected your thoughts or behaviors.

C. Make a list of all the characters in the novel engaged in searching for something. Beside each character name, note whether they find what they seek and who, if anyone, helps them.

D. Draw a picture of the strange machine that Jack sees at the circus freak show. Beneath the picture, write a label including the name you would give the object and a short description of its creator, origin, and functions as you imagine them.

E. In the character of Weird Walt, write a monologue in which you talk to yourself about Mrs. Clevenger’s request that you stop drinking, the reason you wear gloves, and the power you have/fear/need. Perform your monologue for friends and classmates.

F. Consider Weezy’s obsession with paranormal phenomena and the Secret History of the World in contrast to Jack’s encounters with mysterious forces and the things he does to try to help people. With friends or classmates, hold a debate as to whether Jack is an ordinary teen...or an actuator.

III. CIRCLES

A. As the novel concludes, Jack wonders if a “circle has closed.” Use this phrase as the title for a poem, song lyrics, or essay reflecting on Jack’s life at the end of the novel.

B. Create a circle-themed word collage on a large piece of poster board. Include definitions, mathematical formulas, clichés and quotations, book and movie titles, and other elements featuring circles.

C. You are a screenwriter hired to develop *Jack: Secret Circles* into a movie. Create a proposal, storyboard, or outline in which you use circles as a recurring image, theme, or plot device in your movie treatment. Design a promotional poster for your movie.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The opening chapters of the novel describe Jack’s encounter with Cody Bockman. How do these chapters help readers better understand Jack? How do rain and other natural elements described in these chapters become important motifs throughout the novel?
2. What do Jack, Weezy and Eddie discover in the Pine Barrens? How does their discovery relate to Weezy’s missing pyramid? Who is Mr. Drexler and what relationship does Jack suspect he has to the pyramid?
3. Explain Jack’s long-held view of Johnson as a safe and peaceful place. Is Jack’s sense of calm created by the town or his relationship to the place? Does everyone feel this

way about their hometown? Do you think the presence of Mr. Devereux at the Lodge changes Jack's perspective? Who, or what, can truly disrupt this serenity?

4. In section 6 of "Sunday", Jack and Weezy consider whether they'd like to be "on the inside" of the school social scene. What words do the pair use to try to define themselves? Are these words accurate? Should they try to be "insiders"? Why or why not? How might these notions relate to Mr. Drexler's comment that Jack's father should not have declined his invitation to join the Septimus Order because "[h]e could have been one of the Movers.... Instead he's out there with the Moved"?

5. What is a "smoker"? Why doesn't Jack's father participate? What sorts of people attend the smoker? How does Weird Walt fit into this group? Compare and contrast the descriptions of the VFW and its smoker with those of the Septimus Lodge and the things that happen there.

6. Do you think Jack was right to videotape the violence at the Vivino home? Why or why not? What might you have done in a similar situation? Explain Mrs. Vivino's point of view. How might this relate to Jack's agreement with Mr. Devereux to withhold information about the Lodge's secret passageway at the end of the novel?

7. Who are the "pineys"? Does Jack do enough to stand up for the piney kids who attend his school? What important information does Levi Coffin give Jack? To whom do you think Levi refers when he uses the phrase "one of us"?

8. What power do you think Mrs. Clevenger wanted Weird Walt to channel? Do you think there is a relationship between Walt and the mysterious beast? What are Jack's feelings about the beast at the end of the novel?

9. Compare Jack's feelings toward Weezy and Karina. Why do you think he might feel that his relationship with Weezy has come "full circle"? What other circles, such as the disappearance and discovery of Cody Bockman, have been completed in the novel? What themes or ideas connect these circles?

10. Do you think the Septimus Order is basically good or evil? What other formal and informal groups, or societies, operate within the novel? Can *Jack: Secret Circles* be read as a study of the dynamics and loyalties at play between individuals and groups? Why or why not?

11. What is your reaction to Karina's statement that "the truth is"? How does this affect Jack's understanding of the notion of secrets in relation to himself and his community? How might you explain the relationship between truth and secrets in your own life? Have you

observed elements of truth and secrecy at play on the world stage, in diplomatic situations, discussions of health policy or other matters? Describe your observations.

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