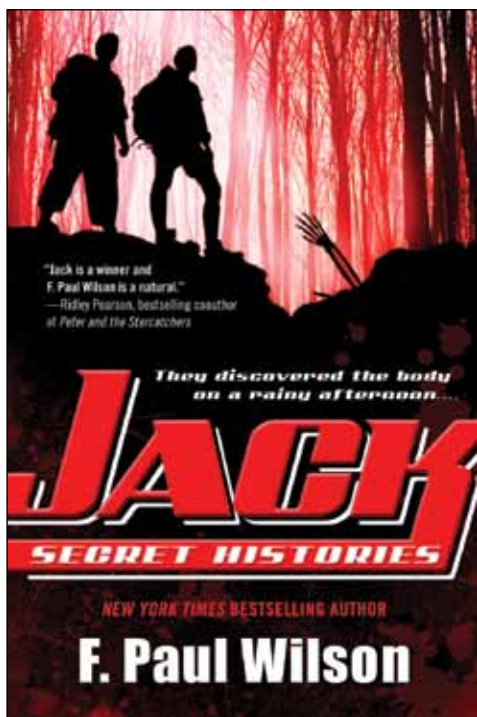




F. Paul Wilson

Jack: Secret Histories



HC • 304 pages • 978-0-7653-1854-1
MM • 320 pages • 978-0-7653-5811-0

“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

“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

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

Ever come across a situation that simply wasn't right—where someone was getting the dirty end of the stick and you wished you could make things right but didn't know how? Fourteen-year-old Jack knows how. Or rather he's learning how. He's discovering that he has a knack for fixing things. Not bikes or toys or appliances—situations....

It all starts when Jack and his best friends, Weezy and Eddie, discover a rotting corpse—the victim of ritual murder—in the fabled New Jersey Pine Barrens. Beside the body is an ancient artifact carved with strange designs. What is its secret? What is the secret of the corpse? What other mysteries hide in the dark, timeless Pine Barrens? And who doesn't want them revealed? Jack's town, the surrounding Barrens, his friends, even Jack himself...they all have...Secret Histories.

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

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

I. EXPLORING ERAS

A. Interview a parent or other adult about their experiences of the early 1980s, inquiring about their favorite books, movies and hobbies, and about their outlook on the world, fears and dreams for the future.

Prepare a short oral report based on your interview, and present it to friends or classmates.

B. Research one eighties reference from the novel, such as *The Return of the Jedi* or the Atari 5200. Find a definition, brief history and, possibly, details on the social or technological impact of the object, trend, or other reference you have chosen. Organize your research into an illustrated pamphlet.

C. With friends or classmates, make a brainstorm list of songs, technologies, news events, fashions, sports heroes, popular books and movies, and even slang that defines your present-day experience. Through discussion, edit your brainstorm list down to the top 10-15 most important items and, finally, vote to choose the three things that best represent your era. Design a poster that includes the year and images of your three selections.

II. MYSTERIES

A. Go to the library or online to learn more about the New Jersey Pine Barrens, the Jersey Devil, or the Pine Lights. Create an animated computer presentation showing the results of your research and/or a spooky trailer warning viewers of the mysteries or dangers of your subject.

B. Using clues from the novel, and your imagination, create a full-color drawing of the Septimus Lodge; invent a list of membership or initiation rules; and/or role-play a lodge meeting in which members discuss whether or not to hire Jack to mow the lodge lawn.

C. Throughout the novel, characters make reference to the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mystery novels. Go to the library or online to learn more about these iconic series, their creator, and how the stories evolved through the decades. Read a book from one of the series and write a review that includes some facts from your research as well as your opinion of the story.

D. Sketch Weezy's pyramid, Mr. Brussard's red box, the Septimus Lodge seal, or another mysterious item from the novel. Imagine you are a scholar researching supernatural phenomena. Label puzzling components of your sketch, noting possible supernatural connections. Write a short, scientific report to accompany your drawing. Make a list of steps you might take to try to learn more about your curious object.

III. SECRETS

A. Do you agree with Weezy that there might be a "secret history of the world"? Go to the library or online to learn more about this concept. Make a reading list of classic novels with a "secret history" or "alternative history" component. With friends or classmates, discuss what might be appealing, plausible or frightening about the notion of "secret histories."

B. In the character of Jack, write a letter to Steve Brussard, offering condolences and trying to explain your actions in terms of the Septimus klazen. Or, in the character of Weezy, write a letter to Professor Nakamura demanding the return of your pyramid and putting forth your theory as to what it is and who stole it.

C. With friends or classmates taking the roles of characters from the novel, hold a meeting to debate whether the citizens of Johnson should insist that the Septimus Lodge no longer operate in your town.

D. Do you agree with Jack's dad that secrets can "wear you down"? Create a rock song, drawing, sculpture, dance, animation, or other artistic work exploring the theme of the burden of secrets.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you know about the early 1980s setting of the novel? What musical, technological, or style references are new to you? What traits and actions of the main characters make them seem like they could be your friends today?
2. What do Jack and his friends do when they discover the sprung animal traps in the Pine Barrens spong? How do their actions help readers realize these characters' senses of right and wrong? Describe how traps serve as a recurring motif in the story.
3. What is Jack's relationship to Weezy? How does this relationship affect his actions? Do you think Weezy helps Jack do the right thing? Or do her actions and words have another effect?
4. Do you relate to your parents or siblings in ways similar to Jack? Why or why not? How do these family dynamics serve as a counterpoint to other group relationships in the story, such as those between members of the Septimus Lodge or between the community and outcasts like Walt and Mrs. Clevenger?

5. What roles do computers, televisions, and other entertainment technologies play in Jack's world? Compare and contrast these technologies to those which you use today.
6. What are Jack's jobs? How does he relate to his boss, Mr. Rosen? What skills does Jack learn working for Mr. Rosen which are useful to him in his adventures with Weezy and Eddie? What is your most unusual skill or interest?
7. In the course of the story, what strategies does Jack use to deal with Steve Brussard's growing addiction problem? Might you have behaved in a similar way? What different choices might you have made, or what advice would you have given to Jack about dealing with his friend's problem?
8. Jack's dad cautions him about jumping to conclusions with the Latin phrase "post hoc ergo propter hoc" (after this, therefore because of this). Have you ever applied such flawed logic to a situation and, if so, what was the result? How might this Latin phrase relate to Jack's father's comment that something doesn't need to exist to have power, "all it needs is for some people to believe it exists"? Do you agree with Jack's father's logic?
9. What do you think happened to Weezy's cube and pyramid? What is the relationship between the Septimus Lodge and the mysterious excavations in the Pine Barrens? What theory would you put forth to explain the strange pyramid-like structure Jack, Eddie, and Weezy explore near the end of the novel?
10. What is the mysterious mist Jack sees flowing along Harding Street at the end of the novel? Do you believe the mist had something to do with the death of Mr. Challis? What do you think the mist represents?
11. Early in the story, Jack notes that, "The difference between loner and loser was one letter. Which was he?" How might the final pages of the book help you answer this question for Jack? Why might it be important for Jack to see himself more as a "repairman" than a detective? Explain your answers.
12. In the final chapter of the novel, Jack realizes "everybody ha[s] secrets, including himself." Are all secrets the same? Is it all right to keep secrets? Do you think any human being is without secrets? How might individual secrets relate to the larger mystery of "secret histories" explored in the novel?