**Escape Room Activity: The Cursed Carnival**

***The Haunted Chronicles***

**Age Level:** 9 – 13 years
**Duration:** 45–60 minutes
**Group Size:** 3–5 students per group
**Objective:** Students must work together to solve a series of puzzles related to the novel *The Haunted Chronicles: The Cursed Carnival* and “escape” the carnival before time runs out. The activity reinforces reading comprehension, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

**Overview:**

Students are trapped in the cursed carnival, and the only way out is to solve riddles, decipher clues, and unlock the secrets hidden in different carnival-themed stations. The escape room is designed to complement the story, but it can be enjoyed without prior knowledge of the book as well.

**Materials:**

* Printed puzzle sheets and clues (one set per group)
* Locks (combination or key, optional)
* Envelopes or boxes for clues
* Carnival-themed decorations (optional for immersion)
* Timer (digital or classroom clock)
* Prizes or certificates for groups that "escape"

**Escape Room Setup:**

Each station or puzzle represents a different part of the cursed carnival from the book. You can set up physical stations around the classroom or organize the activity through envelopes and boxes.

1. **Introduction Story**
Read aloud to set the mood:
"You and your friends are trapped in the cursed carnival, and the sinister ringmaster has given you one challenge: solve his twisted games before time runs out, or you’ll be trapped forever. Each clue will lead you to the next challenge, but only if you work together. Can you escape before the carnival claims you?"

**Stations and Puzzles:**

**Station 1: The Ferris Wheel Cipher (Decoding Puzzle)**

**Clue:**
"You’ve boarded the Ferris Wheel, and the ride is spinning out of control. There’s a message hidden in the lights of the wheel. Can you decode it?"

**Puzzle:**
The first clue is written in a simple Caesar cipher (or a number shift code). For example, shift each letter of the message by 3. The encrypted message could be:
“Vkwuqh lwqjvh: Oofz tf fwg vkwudw uif ovncfst. Efbez dpnqmfuf!”
The decoded message would read:
“Find the next clue: Look to the twisted rides. Ready complete!”

**Solution:**
Students need to decode the cipher to find out where the next clue is hidden. The answer leads them to the Twisted Rides station.

**Station 2: Twisted Rides Riddle (Riddle Puzzle)**

**Clue:**
"Welcome to the Twisted Rides. The carnival’s rides hold strange secrets. Solve this riddle to continue your journey."

**Riddle:**
"I can be tall, short, fast, or slow,
But my purpose is clear wherever I go.
I thrill and excite, make hearts beat fast,
And when I stop, you’ve had a blast.
What am I?"

**Answer:**
A ride. Once students guess the answer, they can move on to the next challenge.

**Station 3: The Hall of Mirrors (Visual Puzzle)**

**Clue:**
"Inside the Hall of Mirrors, you face your dark reflection. Only by understanding what is real can you move forward."

**Puzzle:**
Provide students with a set of images, some real and some distorted reflections. They must find and circle all of the real images. These can be a mix of animals, objects, or shapes. For example, they may need to identify which object is the real version of a chair among four distorted mirrors.

**Solution:**
When students successfully identify the real images, they receive the next clue leading them to the Sinister Clowns.

**Station 4: The Sinister Clowns (Logic Puzzle)**

**Clue:**
"The clowns are watching, and they only let you pass if you solve their riddle. Use logic to figure out the right combination to open the next gate."

**Puzzle:**
This puzzle could be a simple logic grid or lock combination. For example:
Three clowns each have a colored balloon. The blue balloon is not held by the tallest clown. The shortest clown has a red balloon. The middle-height clown holds the green balloon. Which clown holds which balloon?

**Solution:**
Tallest clown: green balloon
Middle-height clown: blue balloon
Shortest clown: red balloon

This could unlock a physical lock or be used to solve a key word needed to move to the final station.

**Station 5: The Ringmaster’s Final Game (Math Puzzle or Critical Thinking Puzzle)**

**Clue:**
"You’ve reached the ringmaster’s lair, but there’s one final game to play before you can leave. Solve this puzzle to break the curse."

**Puzzle:**
Create a math or critical thinking puzzle that connects to the concept of breaking the curse. For example, students might need to figure out the correct sequence of numbers to “break the curse” using the following clue:
"The ringmaster's carnival returns every 50 years, and the game is played for 5 hours each night. Divide the years by the hours, then add 5 to the total. This will reveal the final code."

**Solution:**
50 divided by 5 = 10.
10 + 5 = 15.
The final answer is “15,” and this code unlocks the final “gate,” allowing students to escape the carnival.

**Escape Room Conclusion:**

Once students have solved all the puzzles and broken the curse, they “escape” the cursed carnival. You can offer certificates of completion or small rewards for the groups that finish within the time limit.

**Optional: Prizes for Escapees**

* Stickers or bookmarks related to the book
* Certificates for each student or group declaring them as "Escape Room Masters"
* Small carnival-themed prizes (like fake tickets or small toys)

**Teacher/Librarian Notes:**

1. **Difficulty Adjustments:**
If needed, you can modify the difficulty of the puzzles to better fit your students’ age and ability levels. For example, the ciphers can be simplified, or the riddles can be more straightforward.
2. **Teamwork Focus:**
Encourage collaboration and communication throughout the activity. This escape room is designed to challenge students to think critically and work together, fostering important life skills while reinforcing key themes and lessons from *The Cursed Carnival*.
3. **Integration with Novel Study:**
This escape room activity ties in well with the themes and plot points of *The Cursed Carnival*. Use it as a culminating activity after students have read the novel to immerse them in the story’s world, or as a fun introduction to the book to pique their interest.

**Reflection and Debrief:**

After completing the escape room, have a class discussion to reflect on the experience:

1. What was the most challenging part of the activity?
2. How did you work together as a team to solve the puzzles?
3. If you could change one thing about the carnival, what would it be?
4. How did the escape room connect to the themes of the book?
5. How would you rate your ability to work together and think critically in a timed situation?