



Reading Group Guide for
Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra
By Stuart Gibbs

About the Book

After tracking down incredible discoveries by Einstein and Darwin, kid genius Charlie Thorne is back. This time, the great ruler Cleopatra has left behind an extremely valuable and powerful treasure, its location encoded on an ancient stone tablet.

In 30 BCE, Cleopatra and her husband, Marc Antony, lost their war against Octavian for control of the Egyptian Empire. However, Cleopatra knew Octavian was really after the mysterious item that was the source of all her wealth and influence, so she hid it before dying by suicide. She left a series of devious clues behind for her children to find it, but the clues were lost to history . . . until now.

In a breathless adventure that takes her across the globe, Charlie must fight for her life against ruthless enemies, match wits with Cleopatra, and solve the two-thousand-year-old mystery to prevent the most powerful treasure of the ancient world from falling into the wrong hands.

Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra* as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. In the prologue of *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, readers learn that Cleopatra sees herself as running out of time before Octavian, who has already defeated her armies and prompted the death of her husband Marc Antony, comes for the mysterious item he believes she holds that is the source of her wealth and influence. In what ways does the opening scene set the stage for the events to follow?
2. Part 1 of the novel (“The Tablet”) opens with the following quote by Shakespeare from his play *Antony and Cleopatra*: “Egypt, thou knew’s too well, / My heart was to thy rudder tied by th’strings.” Do you have any thoughts as to what he meant by this?
3. As the book opens, readers discover that “On the evening of her thirteenth birthday, Charlie Thorne committed a crime.” In your opinion, is this a shocking revelation? Based on what you may already know about her, why do Charlie’s actions feel unsurprising? Is this typical behavior for the soon-to-be teen?
4. Though Charlie “had no intention to steal anything or hurt anyone, she knew from experience that even the most carefully thought-out plans often went wrong.” (Chapter one) Reflecting back on her past adventures, can you think of moments that prove her assessment of those experiences to be true? Why might this be the case?

5. As a result of her high IQ, readers know Charlie is exceptionally smart and unlike others her age. Are there ways in which she is like a regular young teen? If so, in what ways are those?
6. Describe Ahmet Shah. What are the things that matter most to him? Though he is the son of a crime lord, does he live up to his father's expectations? Why or why not? Do you see his father as a greater threat to Charlie? If so, in what ways?
7. In considering the artifact displayed in Ahmet Shah's condo, Charlie thinks that "an artifact so powerful and significant should never have been in a private collection." Do you believe Charlie to be right? Should such antiquities be kept in museums, or should wealthy individuals be allowed to own them?
8. While thinking about her family, Charlie considers her half-brother Dante, a CIA agent "who had blackmailed her into working for the government" and was now "the reason she was now on the run, pursued by intelligence agencies and criminals around the globe." Given Dante's responsibility for her current predicament, what do you think his responsibilities toward Charlie should be going forward? What kind of relationship do they have? Do you believe it to be changing? If so, in what ways?
9. Consider the CIA's Project Hope. How does the unorthodox decision to protect Einstein's Pandora by using Charlie Thorne prove to be so risky for the agency? How does Jamilla Carter's loss of her job as CIA director impact the Charlie Thorne mission for the CIA? Consider the CIA's motivation: Do you believe they have Charlie's best interest at heart? Why or why not?
10. In what ways is Arthur Zell's approach to Charlie Thorne and his agents alarming? Were you surprised by his choices regarding the treatment of Charlie, Dante, and Milana?
11. Readers learn that "even though Charlie Thorne was smarter than almost anyone that had ever lived, she often found it was to her advantage to let people think she wasn't smart at

all.” Why does this approach work for Charlie? Can you think of any ways in which this technique could backfire?

12. When Charlie questions Ahmet about Cleopatra’s tablet, he tells her that his great-grandfather thought it was an important piece of antiquity. Why is his great-grandfather’s purchase of a historic relic such as this one so problematic?

13. As Charlie sedates him with chloroform, Ahmet tells her, “Beware of the curse of Cleopatra.” Why does this warning seem so ominous? Throughout the novel, are there ways in which the curse seems to prove itself to be true? Offer some examples from the text.

14. Given what you’ve learned about them in *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, describe Milana and Dante. How does the shift to their no longer being CIA agents seem to impact them? Are there ways in which you believe this makes them better or worse people? What are your thoughts about the relationship between the two of them? How does this shift away from being agents change the way Charlie interacts with the couple?

15. Throughout *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra* and the other books in the Charlie Thorne series, Charlie has faced several formidable foes, including the Mukhabarat and Mossad agents. Who do you find to be most worrisome, and why?

16. When Dante notes that he believed Cleopatra was “famed for her beauty,” Charlie retorts that,

“In her time, Cleopatra was famed for her intelligence, her leadership, and her diplomacy. It wasn’t until long after she was dead that people started to say she must have been beautiful. Mostly men. They found it easier to believe that Julius Caesar and Marc Antony had fallen for her because of her looks rather than her brains.” (Chapter fifteen)

In what ways does this exchange spotlight the problematic societal emphasis on the value of beauty when it comes to women?

17. Charlie's drive to find and safeguard Cleopatra's treasure takes her around the world. Besides what she sees, what do you believe to be the most important things she discovers along the way? Of the places she journeys to in *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, which would you most like to visit some day and why?
18. What do you believe is Jamilla Carter's motivation to help Charlie? Are her actions purely altruistic or is something else at play?
19. In the epilogue, readers learn that Charlie found and shared classified documents that "indicated CIA Director Arthur Zell had ordered the death of two of his own agents." Why does Dante's reaction to Charlie's actions not seem as enthusiastic as one might expect? Do you think she made the right decision?
20. While telling Dante and Milana that it's time to move on from hanging out on tropical islands, she shares that "There's a lot more discoveries on Einstein's list. We have to find them before anyone else does. We need to keep them safe." Why does Charlie feel such a responsibility to do so? What does she gain by this? What are the personal costs to her?
21. Considering the conclusion of *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, what do you predict will be the next adventure Charlie finds?

Research Prompts and Activities

1. In *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, Charlie discovers evidence of the possible existence of the Library at Alexandria, one of the greatest lost treasures of the ancient world. Use the following questions to learn more about this.
- What happened to the Library of Alexandria?
 - What types of information sources were believed to be there?
 - Did any books or other materials survive?

- Who is believed to have destroyed the library?
- Are there ongoing efforts to locate it?
- Was the library ever found?

After completing your research, share your new knowledge in a presentation or essay.

2. Early in the novel, readers learn what many historians and biographers believe about Cleopatra's final days. Learn more about this theory and others from the internet and also from this piece at History.com: <https://www.history.com/news/cleopatra-suicide-snake-bite>

After reading, engage in a small group conversation about what you learned. Did anyone have questions that were left unanswered? Come up with a plan to work together to discover the answers to any questions your group still has.

3. In the prologue of *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, readers observe Cleopatra trying to prepare for the arrival of Octavian and her understanding of what she believes would be her impending demise at his hands. Research to discover more about Octavian's time spent in Alexandria, being sure to learn about the following:

- When did Octavian arrive in Egypt?
- What were his interactions with Cleopatra and her former husbands?
- Prior to this attempted conquest, in what other ways had Octavian demonstrated his inability to be trusted?
- Who were the other important figures in this battle against Octavian for control of Rome and Alexandria?
- What were some of the primary accomplishments of this battle?
- What were the greatest challenges or obstacles?

After examining what you learned, engage in a discussion about Cleopatra's actions and analyze the outcomes.

4. Cleopatra is considered one of the most influential female rulers of the ancient world. Using resources from the library and the internet, investigate the life and work of Cleopatra, being sure to look closely at the following:

- When and where did she live?

- What were her most important contributions?
- What attributes made her a capable ruler?
- What were her goals as a ruler? As a wife? A mother?
- How did her leadership influence the rest of the world?
- What are some additional facts you found interesting?

After conducting your research, create and share a digital artifact that synthesizes the highlights of your findings.

5. Throughout the adventures of *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, Charlie's mission is to locate and capture Cleopatra's hidden treasure before it falls into the wrong hands. Working as a team, create a map of Charlie's whereabouts, charting all the locations she visits. Calculate the distances she travels from each point to the next, and estimate the length of time it takes her. If you could take a similar journey, would you? Upon completion, pair up with another team, compare your findings, and engage in a discussion about embarking on a similar adventure.

6. In *Charlie Thorne and the Curse of Cleopatra*, as Charlie searches for Cleopatra's treasure, she finds clues that take her to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, one of the largest and most important repositories of ancient art in the world. Use the following questions and the Met's resources to learn more about the museum itself and what is offered there.

- Where in New York is the Met located?
- What size is the museum?
- In addition to the art collection, are there any other reasons it's so well known?
- How are the collections cared for?
- Which collections do you find most interesting?

After completing your research, share your new knowledge with peers.

7. Early in the novel, readers travel with Charlie to visit the Acropolis in hopes of discovering Cleopatra's hidden secrets. Using library resources and the internet, research to learn more about the citadel of the Acropolis. Be sure to consider these questions:

- What exactly is the Acropolis?
- Where is it located?

- Why was this area so important to the ancient Greeks?
- What conservation efforts are in place to preserve it?
- What is Cleopatra's connection to this area?
- What is the most well-known structure there?

After completing your research, share your newly discovered knowledge with peers.

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