

A Curriculum Guide to  
**Five Kingdoms, Book 1: *Sky Raiders***  
By Brandon Mull

**About the Book**

When slave traders from another world kidnap sixth grader Cole's best friends, he follows them to The Outskirts, a realm beyond our own made up of five kingdoms. Once he arrives in the Outskirts, Cole is quickly taken away to Skyport, home of the Sky Raiders. Cole is forced to become a Sky Raiders scout, risking his life to find treasure in floating castles. After a girl named Mira befriends him, Cole responds by defending her from deadly enemies. Along with two other scouts, Cole and Mira flee their armed pursuers, only to end up in even more danger. Join Cole in this harrowing heroic journey to save his friends, old and new.

**Prereading Question**

What does it mean to be a hero? Does a hero have to show physical courage? Is the courage to do the right thing enough to be a hero? What's the difference between a hero and a superhero?

**Setting**

The following questions particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–6.1, 3) (RL.7.1)

1. Compare the Outskirts and its Five Kingdoms to our world. Discuss similarities and differences in areas like transportation, terrain, weather, clothing, government, laws, and customs. What are the biggest differences between the two worlds?
2. Describe shaping and semblances, giving specific examples. What positive impact do they have on life in the Outskirts? What negative impact?
3. What is life like for the Sky Raiders? Describe their home and their work. In what ways is working for the Sky Raiders a good development for Cole? In what ways is it a problem? What does he learn as a scout?
4. Contrast the life and rights of a slave versus a freeman. How does someone end up as a slave? Can that status be changed? How does Jace treat the two slaves in Chapter 29? Why is he so harsh to the older slave?

**Themes**

The following questions particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 2) (RL.4.3) (RL.6.3)

1. Being a hero is at the heart of this novel. “The vital question is, are you a hero?” says Lyrus. Find similarities and differences in how Lyrus and Cole define a hero. Where in the book does Cole act like a hero, according to his definition? Do other characters act like heroes? Give specific examples.

2. Often, part of being a traditional hero entails fighting monsters. Describe some of the monsters that Cole encounters. Where do the monsters in Brady’s Wilderness come from? Find the monsters from Greek or Roman mythology that Lyrus fights or just mentions. Look up the ones you don’t know. Why do you think the author included these mythological monsters?

3. Guilt is an important theme in this novel. Find specific passages where Cole and Mira feel guilty. Why does Cole feel guilty? How does the guilt influence his choices? Do other characters agree with his assessment of his guilt? Do you? Why or why not? Why does Mira feel guilty about Carnag? How does feeling guilty affect her actions?

### **Character**

The following questions particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 3)

1. Describe Cole’s relationship with Mira. How does she help him? How does he help her? Why do they like each other? How does their relationship change during the course of the story?

2. Compare Cole and Jace, and describe how they interact with each other. What are some differences in their backgrounds? In what ways do the two work well together? What causes tension between them? Give specific examples from the story.

3. Cole thinks Jace has romantic feelings for Mira. Describe how Jace interacts with Mira. In what ways are they important to each other? How are their backgrounds similar and different? When Jace learns that Mira’s a princess, how does that change his view and actions?

4. Describe the steps Cole, Mira, Jace, Twitch, and Liam take to defeat Carnag. What strengths does each of them bring to the mission? How do they work together and help one another in the process?

### **Plot**

The following questions particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1) (RL.4.3) (RL.6.3) (RL.5–6.5, 6)

1. Why does the book open with Halloween? What does this foreshadow about Cole’s future? How does Cole’s costume as a scarecrow full of arrows relate to the rest of the book? Find other examples of foreshadowing in the first chapter.

2. A hero often gets advice along his journey. What advice does Cole get and from whom? Is it useful? How does he use the advice in making his decisions?

3. Magical objects are important in the plot. What magical objects do Cole, Jace, Twitch, and Mira carry with them on their journey to find Carnag? What role does each magical object play in that adventure? Which one would you want if you were in danger, and why?

4. Some chapters end with cliff-hangers, which leave the reader in suspense until the next chapter. Others don't. Find examples of cliff-hangers and analyze how they create suspense. Find examples of other chapter endings, such as those that wrap up an adventure, and compare their effect to cliff-hangers.

5. Chapter 16, titled "Messenger," is filled with suspense. Analyze how the author creates suspense through a series of events and by withholding information from the reader. How does seeing the events unfold from Cole's point of view heighten the tension? For example, when does he realize Adam Jones is helping him and Mira?

### **Language & POV**

The following questions particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.4) (RL.5–6.6)

1. The Sky Raiders say to one another before a mission, "Die bravely." Why do they say that? What role does death play in their work? Cole and Mira also say it to Lyrus when they first part ways. In return he says, "Live well." Why does he reply that way?

2. This novel has a limited omniscient narrator who conveys Cole's inner thoughts and emotions. Find examples of that in the book. How would the novel change if the narrator were omniscient? Why do you think the author chose this point of view?

3. Because adventure is central to this novel, the author uses many strong action verbs. Look at the scene where Cole and Mira are flying in the coffin. Write down the verbs that describe the flight, looking up definitions for any you don't know. Discuss the actions described by the verbs, how they differ from one another, and the mental images they create.

### **Activities**

**Floating Castles:** First have students recall the different castles Cole encounters, discussing their inhabitants and dangers. Then have students come up with a floating castle of their own, complete with architecture, furnishings, and hazards such as monsters. Have them describe it in words and create a drawing, painting, or other artistic response. Assemble a display of the castles with their descriptions.

**Who's a Hero?** Have students, in pairs or small groups, do research on heroes in mythology. They should choose a hero and make notes on the important features of the hero's life and journey. Have each group give a short presentation on their hero, noting if the hero's story is similar in any way to parts of *Sky Raiders*. Then have students discuss general characteristics of heroes and their journeys, drawing on their research and *Sky Raiders*.

*Guide written by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of Great Books for Girls and Great Books about Things Kids Love.*

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