

## A Curriculum Guide to

### ***The Player King***

By Avi

#### **About the Book**

Lambert Simnel is a kitchen boy for a tavern in Oxford, England, 1486. He has no education and certainly no idea about kings and royalty except for what he's learned from street interludes performed in town squares. One evening a mysterious stranger takes him away and tells him he is the rightful king of England, Prince Edward. What ensues is a rags-to-riches tale that confounds an entire nation. Based on a true incident in history, this is the story of Lambert Simnel and those around him who were willing to do anything to gain power, wealth, and control.

#### **Prereading Activities**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.2, 9)

1. Study the cover of the book and the title. Describe what you see and what it tells you about what might be in this story. What do you anticipate happening in the story?
2. Historical Fiction is a unique genre. There are some stories that take place in a time period with made up characters; other stories have real characters in real settings, but with made up dialog; still others have historical context but no historical facts; some stories combine all those elements. As you are reading, decide what kind of historical fiction book this is. Find examples that help you understand the time, setting, and characters.

#### **Key Ideas and Details**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (W.4–7.6,8,9)

1. Describe Lambert Simnel in this novel: Who is he? What happens to him? What is his job?
2. How does Lambert change from the beginning of the novel to the end? Find three specific examples of how he has changed over the course of the book.
3. Imagine that Lambert has been asked to write about his experience and what he has learned. What would he write about in his book, journal, or song?
4. Lambert tries to run away several times, and then chooses not to try anymore. What happened that changed his mind? Why did he want to run away? What would you have done if you were in his shoes?
5. How does Lambert demonstrate that he is intelligent? Why is this important? What does “feble-minded” mean, and why is this important in the story?

6. How does Lambert feel when he realizes what he has been chosen to do? Does this change how he feels about himself? Why or why not? Provide evidence from the story to support your answers.
7. How does this experience change Lambert's life? How does it change his relationship to those around him? How does the direct order, "Do as you're told," add to this experience?
8. How does Brother Simonds treat Lambert? How does their relationship change during the story? Cite specific examples that show their relationship.
9. Lambert's rise and fall is based on a lie. What events cause Lambert to follow along? What are the consequences of this lie? Support your answer with specific examples from the story.
10. At the beginning of chapter 15, Lambert wakes with three thoughts. Explain these thoughts and why he might have them.
  - a. I am not the king of England.
  - b. Brother Simonds is a lunatic.
  - c. I must escape.
11. Chapter 20 brings us to a turning point for Lambert. What does this chapter (and those from 15 to 20) tell us about his personality and temperament? Find an example to support your thinking.
12. Who are Lambert's friends? Does he have any? Explain your reasoning.

### **Author's Craft and Structure**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.4)

1. The author uses figurative language, symbols for abstract ideas, and a style of writing that gives us a sense of time, place, and setting. How does his use of similes and metaphors contribute to the story? He also uses expressions like, "I went on a pilgrimage to Canterbury," "You deep patch of dung!" and "I'd remember those responses, so when asked again, I had his words like arrows in my quiver, and if required, I could send them home." Find other examples that contribute to the story's meaning and help us understand characters and setting.

### **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.6) (W.4–7.6,7,8,9)

1. How is life different for children of Lambert's time and for children now? How is it similar? Make a chart that shows these differences.
2. How are the physical settings (Tackley's Tavern, street scenes, towns, houses, castles, and cathedrals) important in this story? Could this story take place anywhere?
3. Are kings, queens, and other royalty important? Compare and contrast how society then and society now places significance upon people with royal titles. What importance is placed upon achieving success based on one's abilities?

4. In chapter 22, the friar talks about a bird called the phoenix. Research the legend of this bird. How does it relate to this story?
5. In chapter 27, Lambert engages self-talk. He uses expressions such as, “do not fade,” “If you act like a king...you will be king.”; but there are also reminders that “what can be found, can be lost.” Explain what is going on in this chapter. How and why are the Friar, Lovell, and Lincoln helping Lambert find his place in this charade? Do you think Lambert will succeed in his quest to be king? Could these things happen today?
6. If you could give advice to Lambert, what would it be and why? How might your advice change the course of this book?
7. If you could spend one day with Lambert, which day would it be? Explain your day with examples from the story.
8. How does this experience change Lambert’s life? How does it change his relationship to others? The King? Do his newfound knowledge, ability to read and write, and manners make things easier or harder for him? In your opinion, is knowledge a good thing or a dangerous thing?
9. In Chapter 38 (ARC), Lambert (a commoner) and King Henry VII have a conversation where King Henry suggests that there are no real differences between the two of them. Do you agree or disagree with this? What is the motivation behind the conversation? What drives King Henry VII to do what he does? What do King Henry’s actions infer about him as a King? How is this important to the story, and what does this tell us about King Henry? Support your answer with examples from the story to help explain your reasoning.

### **Extension Activities**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.5) (SL.4–7.1,2,3,4,5,6) (W.4–7.6,8,9) (RI.4–7.3) (RST.6–7.7)

1. The fifteenth century *Babees’ Book: Medieval Manners for the Young* (found here: [http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/babees\\_rickert.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/babees_rickert.pdf)) has examples of the manners and etiquette that Lambert was required to learn for his role as king. Using the poems from this book, *The ABC of Aristotle*, *Urbanitat’s*, and *The Little Children’s Little Book*, make a list of manners and etiquette that Lambert was required to learn. Make a compare-and-contrast chart that lists these manners and etiquette on one side and what the equivalent modern-day manners and etiquette might be. Use books and websites by Emily Post, Oprah, and *Parenting* magazine to research modern-day manners and etiquette for children today.
2. Create a Reader’s Theater in the style of the players from the beginning of the story. Choose a scene from the story (battle scene, coronation scene, tavern scene, etc.). Use the language and style of writing that the author uses. Find basic props to support your scene and perform for your audience.
3. Using an online tool such as *Animoto* (<https://animoto.com/>) or any other storytelling application, create a book trailer for *The Player King*.
4. Create a diorama of the cathedral where the Earl of Warwick is crowned king. Use a book such as *Cathedral* by David Macauley to help you design and construct your cathedral.

5. Write a persuasive essay from Lambert's point of view on why he should not be king. Back up your argument with specific examples from the story. Be sure to:
  - a) Know your audience
  - b) Speak the language of your audience
  - c) Use information and/or data to illustrate your point(s)
  - d) Think "Quid Pro Quo" I'll do for you if you'll do for me....
6. You have been asked to write the sequel to this story. Create an outline and possible first chapter for what happens next to Lambert. Do some research on Lambert to find out more about his life.
7. Create a triptych panel drawing in three sections: the first, showing Lambert as a kitchen boy; the middle, as he is in training; and the third, as king. Be sure to include details from each of these time periods in his life in your drawing.

### **Tier II Vocabulary**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.4) (L.4–7.4)

- Stench
- Tattered
- Interlude
- Tabor
- Motley
- Sinewy
- Pate
- Tonsure
- Piously
- Scullion
- Trestle
- Yeomen
- Niches
- Pagans
- Infuriated
- Baffled
- Banter
- Dregs
- Assay
- Groat
- Supplication
- Curded
- Courtiers
- Despicable
- Conferred
- Larders
- Tedium
- Mammered
- Preposterous

- Flackering
- Roistering
- Muckworm
- Trencher
- Refinements
- Poleaxes
- Gawping
- Unrelenting
- Ruefully
- Claimant
- Rebecs
- Sackbuts
- Decree
- Burnished
- Rampant
- Drubbing
- Incessantly
- Rebuked
- Billeter
- Boisterous
- Glowered
- Deference
- Furled
- Smoldering
- Quay
- Moat
- Barbican
- Portcullis
- Throngs
- Denounced
- Scudding
- Usurper
- Halberds
- Vanguard
- Tyrant
- Treachery
- Deployed
- Intermingled
- Fleam
- Quiver

### **Historical fiction**

Here are some other books written by Avi in this genre:

- *The Barn*
- *Captain Grey*
- *Catch You Later, Traitor*
- *City of Orphans*
- *Crispin: Cross of Lead*
- *Crispin: At the Edge of the World*
- *Crispin: The End of Time*
- *Don't You Know There's a War On?*
- *Encounter at Easton*
- *Escape from Home*
- *Fighting Ground*
- *Finding Providence*
- *Hard Gold*
- *History of Helpless Harry*
- *Into the Storm*
- *Iron Thunder*
- *Night Journeys*
- *Punch with Judy*
- *Secret School*
- *Sophia's War*
- *The Traitor's Gate*
- *The Unexpected Life of Oliver Cromwell Pitts*
- *Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?*

Please visit Avi's website at <http://www.avi-writer.com/index.html> to find even more titles and to learn more about the author.

*Curriculum Guide written in 2017 by Sharon Haupt, District Librarian, San Luis Coastal Unified School District.*

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