

A Curriculum Guide to

The Unwanteds Quests, Book 1: *Dragon Captives*

By Lisa McMann

About the Book

What if you had magical powers you were forbidden to use? That’s what makes life so frustrating for twelve-year-old twins Thisbe and Fifer Stowe. Their older brother, Alex, ruler of Artimé, worries so much about his sisters that he’s barred them from magic lessons. But when Alex refuses to help a young dragon, the twins and their friend, Seth, secretly leave with the dragon to rescue his captive siblings. Excited about the quest, the three don’t foresee the deadly dangers they’ll face in the land of Grimere. They’ll need to learn from their mistakes—and learn quickly—if they are going to survive.

Discussion Questions

Prereading Questions: What are some benefits of making mistakes? How can persisting even after failure be a valuable approach?

Setting

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1)

1. What do you learn in the first chapter about the story’s setting, genre, and overall tone? How does the author convey so much without explaining it directly?
2. What are some of the physical challenges that Hux and the children face on the journey to Grimere? Discuss the waterfall and what it takes to survive crossing it. In what way is the waterfall, as Thisbe calls it, “the end of the world”?
3. Describe the countryside and towns of Grimere. What sort of people do the Artiméans encounter? How does Grimere compare to Artimé?

Characters

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

1. What do you learn about Thisbe and Fifer in the first chapter? Tie your answers to specific sentences and scenes.
2. Describe the twin girls and compare them to each other. What are their personalities? How are they similar and how are they different? How do they feel about each other and interact with each other?

3. Although Thisbe doesn't remember, she killed a pirate captain when she was two. How and why did she do it? How does she feel about it now? Discuss times in the novel when she thinks about her ability to kill.
4. Why is Alex so protective of the twins? Explain why he keeps them from learning magic. What does it tell you about him? Do you think his choice is the right one? Why or why not?
5. Why are other adults in Artimé disappointed in Alex? From their comments and other information in the narrative, what do you learn about Alex when he was younger? How has he changed?
6. During some of their adventures, Thisbe, Fifer, and Seth have to work as a team. What are some of the ways they cooperate? How do they get along together as a threesome? Analyze the strengths that each of them brings to the journey.
7. Who is Dev and how does he interact with the kids from Artimé? The dragons say he is half good and half evil. Point to evidence of his goodness and evidence of his "evil" side. What factors in his life influence his behavior?
8. Describe the princess and how she treats people around her, including Dev. Why is she described as rebellious? Describe her interactions with the kids from Artimé. Why does she order the soldiers to let Seth go?

Plot & Structure

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.3) (RL.5-6.5)

1. What motivates the girls to leave the island? Why do they draw Seth into their plans? Why do they hide it from the other islanders? Identify comments that show that the three of them think their choice might have been a mistake.
2. Hux plays a central role in the plot. How does he propel the story's action? Describe his background and personality. Why is he so secretive, even when the children are trying to help him?
3. Simber, Carina, and Thatcher set off to rescue the twins and Seth. Why are the three of them chosen to go? What happens to each of them when they reach the land of dragons?
4. How does Thisbe react to Dev when he is leading them to the castle? What are some of his actions that make her distrust him? Why doesn't she part ways with him?
5. Simber and his companions encounter Sky and Scarlet on their journey. What is Sky working on? In what way is it dangerous? What do you think happens to her at the end?

Themes

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.2, 3)

1. Lani, who's in a wheelchair, seems to embrace life fully. In contrast, Alex feels that his injured arm holds him back in life. Why do you think he feels that way? What effect does it have on him, his work, and his relationships?
2. What is Seth like at the beginning of the book? How does he change and grow? What role does trying new things and making mistakes have in his changes? Give specific examples of actions that increase his belief in himself.
3. When Carina finally reunites with Seth in Grimere, she has mixed emotions about what he's done. Describe how she feels and why. How do her memories about being young influence her reaction to his choices?

Extension Activities

Your Own Dragon

Have each student create another dragon in Hux's family and depict the dragon on a poster, combining text and art. The poster should convey the dragon's appearance, personality, and place in the family. The text should describe the dragon's feelings about captivity and the possibility of escape, and its reactions to the children.

Moving Around in the World

Have students each create a Venn diagram. In one circle, they should list or draw the forms of transportation mentioned in *Dragon Captives*. In the other circle, they should put forms of transportation in their own lives. If there's any overlap, it should be in the intersecting area of the diagram. Have a discussion about how important world-building is to a fantasy novel and the role that transportation plays in creating a convincing world.

Dev's Diary

What is it like for Dev to encounter the Artiméans? Have students create a diary from Dev's point of view, starting from when he sees Thisbe and Fifer in the marketplace. It should reflect how he feels about the princess and about the choices he makes in the story. Students can imagine what Dev's life is like in the castle and what he hopes for in the future.

Dragon Captives Jeopardy

Create a Jeopardy-style game about the novel. As a class, brainstorm ten categories of questions and discuss how to create questions at a reasonable level. Divide students into five groups to devise questions and answers for two categories each. Use an online template or have students create a game board. Play as a class with each group as a team that can't answer its own questions. (Free online template at jeopardylabs.com.)

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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