

A Curriculum Guide to

Dragon Bones

By Lisa McMann

About the Book

Twin sisters Thisbe and Fifer have never been apart before. Not only are they now separated, but Thisbe is the captive of the Revinir, an evil enemy of their brother, Alex, head mage of Artimé. Fifer, recovered from her life-threatening injuries, wants to be a part of the mission to rescue Thisbe, but Alex forbids it. Fifer secretly works to strengthen her magic and, to her surprise, attracts birds who magically obey her. Meanwhile, Thisbe labors in the dangerous catacombs of Grimere and improves her own, more explosive magic, whenever she can. Will the sisters ever be together again? Fifer and her friends must face danger—and even death—to rescue Thisbe and reunite the twins.

Discussion Questions

Setting

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.1)

1. Describe the catacombs and the work that the slaves do there, including Thisbe’s tasks. What is her living situation like? How does she change it to be in better contact with Rohan? How does she use her time and surroundings to develop her magic?
2. Where does Fifer spend her time in Artimé? How does she feel about being home? How does she learn about magic without attending the lessons? Where does she go to escape Alex and to deal with her frustration?
3. What does Fifer use to travel in, with the help of the birds? Explain how she comes up with the idea and how the birds work together to carry her. What are the advantages and disadvantages of her method of traveling?

Characters

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL. 4–7.1, 4–7.3)

1. Describe the relationship between Thisbe and Fifer, discussing their similarities and differences. How does being twins affect their lives and their magic? What does it feel like to be apart?
2. Why does Thisbe think that no one is coming to rescue her? How does the Revinir undermine Thisbe’s self-confidence and her faith in friends and family? Describe how the Revinir uses Thisbe for experiments.

3. Fifer and Alex don't get along after she returns home. What are the sources of their conflict? How does Alex treat Fifer? Discuss whether you think his decision to keep her from joining the mission to rescue Thisbe is reasonable.
4. Alex's friends feel that he has changed over the years. What caused this change? Why does he have to retrain his skill in magic? How does the rescue mission bring back some of his old personality?
5. Alex is desperately sad about Sky. What happened to her? What was their relationship like? How did she usually help him deal with his problems?
6. Fifer is pleased to have Crow go with her to try to save Thisbe. Describe Crow and his personality. Why does she like him? How is he different from Alex?
7. Rohan becomes important to Thisbe in the catacombs. What is he like? What is mysterious about him? Why do they become friends?

Plot & Structure

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.3, 5-6.5)

1. Thisbe realizes that the Revinir is the former Queen Egala. What does the Revinir want from Thisbe? What does she make Thisbe do? What are the Revinir's goals?
2. Dev also appears in the catacombs. Why is he there? How does Thisbe feel about him when she first sees him? How does her attitude change?
3. What are the events that lead to Princess Shanti's death? Explain her relationship to Dev. What role does Dev play in her death, and what happens to him afterward? What effect does her death have on the kingdom?
4. The scene where Thisbe and Rohan escape is one of the most dramatic moments in the book. Analyze how the author creates this excitement and keeps the reader in suspense, starting from when Thisbe and Rohan escape from the Revinir to when they are safely hidden in the brush near the lake.
5. Talk about Kitten's role in the rescue mission. What are the advantages or skills that make her useful? Is she at a disadvantage in any way? What happens to her at the end of the mission?
6. At certain points in the book, narration shifts between Fifer, Thisbe, and Alex. What is the effect of moving between character perspectives? How does the structure heighten tension?
7. The last two chapters hold big surprises. Explain these twists and what emotions they provoke in you as a reader. Why is the last chapter titled "What Hope Sounds Like"?

8. At the end of the book, which parts of the story are still unresolved? What questions do you have about the characters, either in their present or future moments? For example, where did Dev end up after fleeing the market?

Theme

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.2)

1. How does the Revinir plan to use the dragon bone broth? What does she have to gain and how will she trick her customers? She teaches Thisbe the “weird lesson” that “scarcity increased demand.” Why is the idea of scarcity new to Thisbe? Discuss the role of greed in the plot and as a motivation for the Revinir’s actions.

2. Working together is the key to success in Artimé. In what ways does Alex ignore this principle when addressing Fifer? How does his view of Fifer change during the mission? How does Thisbe work with those around her in the catacombs? What are her goals?

Extension Activities

Who, What, and Where?

Have students imagine that they can spend a day with one of the characters. They should write an essay about who they would choose to be with and why, explaining what they would do during the day and where they would be. Their choices should include references to the novel.

Translating into Comics

Have students choose a favorite scene that contains action and dialogue. Each student should create a comic strip depicting this scene with pictures and words. Post the comic strips and discuss them as a class, comparing choices and depictions. NCTE’s ReadWriteThink offers an online comic strip tool: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/comic-creator-30021.html>

Dragon Bones Profiles

Have students work alone or in pairs to create a profile of one of the characters. The profile should resemble a trading card, with a picture of the character at the top and a description below. Decide as a class what kind of information to include. Create a wall of character profiles in the classroom.

Choose Your Own Ending

The last two chapters hold a few surprises, one of them tragic. How else could the book have ended? Have students rewrite the last two chapters with different results. Their narratives, which should flow logically from the rest of the story, should include most of the same characters, their dialogue, and their actions.

Twin Topics

Thisbe and Fifer are twins, as are Alex and Aaron. Have students do research on twins using print and online resources. Each student should collect at least seven interesting facts about twins in general or about specific pairs of twins. Share the facts in a group and discuss whether they relate to the twins in the novel.

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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