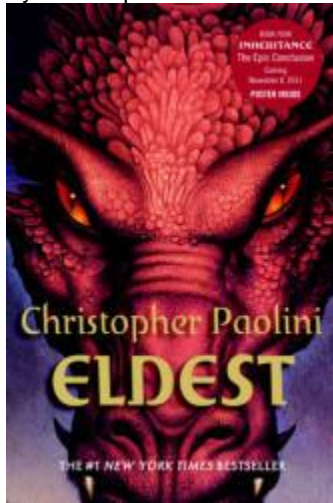


Eldest

By: Christopher Paolini



Reading Group Guide

Introducing Fantasy

Fantasy is a form of literature that presents psychological realities in an imaginative or fantastical way. Using myth and folklore as a background, modern writers of fantasy set their stories in an imagined world or in a real-life setting where magical events take place. Ask the group to discuss folktales and myths they remember hearing or reading in the past. Who were the characters who fought for good, and who were the evil characters? Ask them to describe to each other scenes they remember from those stories. How was magic used? What emotions did the stories evoke? What do they remember of dragons in those early tales? Make a list of character traits exhibited by heroes and villains from folktales and myths. Which of these traits are most important in real-life situations?

WARNING: This guide includes key plot points from both Eldest and Eragon. Should you wish to avoid spoilers, please read both books before this discussion guide!

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Inheritance Books

Eragon's quiet life explodes with drama when he accepts the inheritance that is his: to become a dragon rider who

can change the course of history in his embattled land of Alagaësia. Teamed with his telepathic dragon Saphira, trained by the finest men and elves, challenged by great obstacles, Eragon fights for the survival of all that is good and true in his battle with the cruel Empire

FOR DISCUSSION

1. History and Beliefs

- Compare the different historic traditions of Alagaësia as they are explained in *Eldest*. Why do the dwarves, the elves, and the humans all have such different mythologies? What do their stories tell us about each of their races?
- What does Saphira tell Eragon about the dragons' beliefs in *Eldest*? Compare what the dragons believe with what the dwarves and elves do.
- After reading *Eldest*, explain the origins of the animosity among the races of dragons, elves, dwarves, and humans. What are the effects of those ancient wars on the present day situation in Alagaësia?
- Why are the elves vegetarians? Why does Eragon become a vegetarian after living with them and studying with Oromis in *Eldest*?
- Compare the ways the different races live—the elves in the forest, the dwarves in their caves, the humans in cities and towns. How does the habitat of each of these peoples affect their way of life and their connection with their environment?

2. Family and Home

- Discuss who his parents might be. Why is his father's identity a mystery, and why did his mother bring him to her brother to raise and then disappear? How does the reader's understanding change after reading *Eldest*?
- What was Eragon's life like before he found the dragon's egg in the Spine in *Eragon*? How did his discovery of the egg change his life?
- Why was Eragon comfortable exploring the Spine when everyone else in his village was afraid of the place? What does the Spine represent to the other inhabitants of Carvahall? How does Roran convince them to overcome those fears in *Eldest*?
- Is it hard for Roran to convince the villagers to leave their homes in *Eldest*? What does he hope to find for them when they do leave? Why do some insist on staying behind?
- Does Nasuada take control of the Varden because she is Ajjihad's daughter or because she has special qualities of leadership? Compare Nasuada's relationship with her father in *Eragon* with Arya's relationship with Islanzadí in *Eldest*.

- Why does Hrothgar make Eragon a member of his clan before he leaves Farthen Dûr in *Eldest*? What does this mean to Eragon?

- What feelings do Eragon and Roran experience when they meet again at the end of *Eldest*? Why is Roran so angry with Eragon? Can he forgive Eragon for Garrow's death?

- When Murtagh tells Eragon who he really is at the end of *Eldest*, what effect does it have on him? Do you think what Murtagh tells him is true? What does it mean for Eragon's future?

- In the last chapter of *Eldest*, Eragon thinks: "Fathers, mothers, brothers, cousins . . . It all comes down to family." What does he mean? Who *is* Eragon's true family? Where has he found his greatest sense of belonging?

3. Destiny and Responsibility

- The first line of *Eragon* reads: "Wind howled through the night, carrying a scent that would change the world." What does this opening tell you about the meaning of destiny in the tale? What does the author mean by a "scent that would change the world"?

- Discuss the importance of names in Christopher Paolini's novels. How does it affect Eragon to learn that his name was also the name of the first dragon rider? How does he choose Saphira's name in the first book? In *Eldest*, how is Eragon affected by others calling him "Shadeslayer"? How has Galbatorix gained control over Murtagh and why is that control so complete?

- What does Saphira mean in *Eragon* when she says, "It is our destiny to attempt the impossible, to accomplish great deeds regardless of fear. It is our responsibility to the future." Is this true for everyone? What is the responsibility of each of us to the future?

- In *Eragon*, Angela the fortuneteller says, "To know one's fate can be a terrible thing." Would you want to know your future if someone could tell you? Why does Eragon decide to hear her predictions? What does she mean when she says, "That freedom [to choose your fate] is a gift, but it is also a responsibility more binding than chains"? Which of her predictions (in the chapter titled "The Witch and the Werecoat") actually come true as the story continues in *Eldest*?

- How does it affect Roran when people start to call him "Stronghammer" in *Eldest*? Why does Roran take most of the village of Carvahall with him in his quest to rescue Katrina?

- How does Eragon change in the course of his studies with Oromis in *Eldest*? Which of his new powers are the result of hard training and which are the result of learning more about the use of magic? Is he, indeed, fulfilling a destiny or responding to his sense of duty and responsibility—or both?

4. Trust and Fear

- In *Eragon*, how does Eragon know that he can trust Brom enough to travel with him? Why does he leave his home and all that is familiar to him?

- Who are the Ra'zac and what do they represent to Eragon when he first encounters them in *Eragon*? Why do the Ra'zac return to Carvahall in *Eldest*? Why do they take Katrina away with them? Is it trust or fear that makes the people of Carvahall follow Roran into the wilderness?

- In the first book, when Eragon realizes that Arya is an elf, does it change his feelings about her? Why does he rescue her from the prison even though it puts his own safety in jeopardy? What is it that keeps Arya from returning Eragon's affection in *Eldest*?

- When Eragon finds the stronghold of the Varden in the first book he is challenged and his mind probed by the Twins. Why did Ajihad trust the Twins? Are there clues in *Eragon* to indicate that the Twins were actually working for Galbatorix, as we discover in *Eldest*?

- How does Eragon feel when he learns about Murtagh's parentage in *Eragon*? Does the fact that Murtagh's father was Morzan affect Eragon's trust of him? Does it affect your feelings about his character? What does Eragon feel when he realizes who he is fighting at the end of *Eldest*? Will he ever be able to trust Murtagh again?

- What is Eragon's greatest fear? What is Roran's greatest fear? Do their fears affect the way they act and interact with others? Discuss their reunion in the last chapter of *Eldest*. Why does Roran strike Eragon? How do they regain their trust for each other?

5. Use and Abuse of Power

- In *Eldest*, Oromis says: "As Galbatorix has demonstrated, power without moral direction is the most dangerous force in the world." What does he mean by this? By the end of *Eldest* what other characters have "power without moral direction"?

- Discuss the connection of magic to power in this story. Why does Eragon have to learn the use of magic so slowly, first from Brom (in *Eragon*) and then from Oromis (in *Eldest*)? Who are the other characters that can use magic and what are the limits on their magical powers?

- Why does the use of magic drain the energy of the person performing the magic? What are the ways that Eragon learns to control his use of magic and his energy in *Eldest*?

- In *Eldest*, is Murtagh able to use magic more effectively than Eragon? Why do you think this is so?

6. Good and Evil

- Many fantasy novels deal with the struggle between forces of good and evil. Discuss the ways in which the Inheritance books explore this theme and which characters represent good and which represent evil. Are there some characters that you are still not sure about by the end of *Eldest*?

- *Eragon* begins with the Shade and his ruthless ambush of the elf we later learn is Arya. How did this Prologue affect your anticipation of the story to come? Why is the Prologue titled “Shade of Fear”? What do we learn of the Shade’s past when he is killed at the end of *Eragon*?

- How did Galbatorix establish his rule of Alagaësia? According to the history Brom shares in *Eragon*, what experiences turned Galbatorix into a cruel and feared ruler?

- The Urgals seem to be completely ruthless, yet Eragon is hesitant to kill them with his magic in *Eragon*. In the chapter called “A Costly Mistake,” why does he only use his magic to stun them? Why is he so upset when Murtagh kills Torkenbrand, the slave trader? By the end of *Eldest*, Eragon has different feelings about the Urgals. What has changed his mind?

- In *Eldest* Roran commits crimes in his efforts to save the people of Carvahall who have placed their trust in him; he kills, steals, and uses trickery to get what he needs. Can he justify what he has done in the name of helping others? How does he feel about the men he has killed?

- Why is Oromis so angry about the blessing that Eragon gave to the child in Farthen Dûr? What is the place of Elva in the story by the end of *Eldest*? Is her blessing/curse a force for good or for evil? How can it work both ways?

7. Character Study

- Compare Eragon and his cousin Roran. How do Eragon’s and Roran’s journeys in *Eldest* parallel each other and how are they different? Describe the changes in each of them from the beginning of *Eragon* to the end of *Eldest*. What influences are most important on their growth? Which people and events are most important to their development?

- Compare Brom (in *Eragon*) and Oromis (in *Eldest*). How are they similar and how are they different? What does each of them contribute to Eragon’s training? Which of them, do you think, has the most influence on Eragon’s growth as a Rider?

- How would you describe Arya? Why does Arya reject Eragon’s romantic feelings in *Eldest*? What aspects of her personality contribute to their friendship and what keeps them from having a romantic relationship? How does Arya feel about being the daughter of the queen?

- Compare the magical qualities of Angela and Elva as we see them in *Eldest*. What do we know about each of them and how do their magical abilities contribute to the story? How do you feel about these characters—in terms of their trustworthiness?

- Compare the leadership styles of Nasuada and Orrin, the king of Surda, in *Eldest*. Why do the Varden go to Surda, and what help do they expect from Orrin?

- Describe the character of Saphira. How has she grown from the time she was a hatchling? What does she learn from Glaedr and how does she grow during her training? What are some of the difficult feelings and pain that Saphira and Eragon share? What are some of the joys that they share?

8. One Step Beyond: Predictions

- Do you think Eragon will ever be able to return to the Palancar Valley and Carvahall? He longs for his home in the midst of his adventures, but will he and Roran be able to return to the farm when their adventures are over?

- At the end of the first book, Eragon hears a voice in his head, someone helping him to escape the horrors of Durza's memories. In *Eldes*, we learn that person is Oromis, who will become Eragon's trainer. What foreshadowing comes at the end of *Eldes*? Predict some of the plot of Book Three of Inheritance. What do you expect to happen?

- Who are the characters that might play a major role in the next book? Will Eragon come face-to-face with Galbatorix? Will he fight Murtagh again? Will Eragon and Roran be able to rescue Katrina? Who will provide the most assistance to Eragon?

- Why do you think Galbatorix continues to gain strength, and how is he able to make Murtagh stronger than Eragon? How do you think Eragon and Saphira can develop the strength to combat the evil powers of Galbatorix?

9. Connecting Fantasy to Real Life

- What kinds of good and evil do you hear about in the news of our world? Discuss examples from news stories that report events representing the good and evil in our society and in international news.

- What circumstances can bring people together to become friends and what can make those friendships grow and develop? What circumstances can hurt a friendship? What are some of the ways people have difficulty with family members?

- Do you feel that some people have a destiny to fulfill or a special reason for living? Name people in history who had a strong responsibility to a cause for good or evil. (Possibilities might be Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King for good causes and Attila the Hun, Adolf Hitler, and Josef Stalin for evil.)

- Name some characters from legend, literature, or film who represent the causes of good or evil. (Possibilities might be Luke Skywalker, King Arthur, Frodo for good; Darth Vader, Mordred, Sauron for evil.)

Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Children's Literature Consultant, adjunct professor of literature for youth, and editor of the *Junior Authors and Illustrators* series (H.W. Wilson).