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Welcome to the Ink World

Cornelia Funke's Ink World trilogy introduces us to one of the most amazing ideas in children's literature and an epic adventure of a family with an extraordinary gift. Meggie and her father Mo have the ability to bring a book to life by reading it aloud. This strange power works both directions: characters from the book can appear in the real world, while Meggie and her family can be transported into the world of the book.

Meggie's mother Resa has already disappeared into the book *Inkheart*, and is trapped there in a world of evil kings, greedy villains, and voracious monsters. While Mo and Meggie try to figure out a way to rescue Resa, they become entrenched in the lives of the people of Ombra. In the sequels, Mo, Meggie and Resa try to unseat the unjust and cruel kings who enslave children and punish innocents for their pleasure. A vibrant cast of characters and beings—blue fairies, glass men, and giants, to name a few—have sprung to life out of the imagination of Fenoglio, the author of *Inkheart*, to help the heroes along their way.

Slip into the intriguing and sometimes terrifying magic of *Inkheart*, *Inkspell*, and *Inkdeath*, and explore one of the most imaginative worlds children's literature has ever known.

About *Inkheart*

Mortimer is a bookbinder and has passed on his great love of books to his daughter Meggie, but he has never read aloud to her. When a stranger named Dustfinger appears at their home, Meggie's world turns upside down. She soon learns some startling truths about her mother's disappearance nine years earlier, and the mysterious book called *Inkheart* which her father tries desperately to hide at the book-filled home of Elinor, Meggie's great-aunt. She learns that the reason Mo has never read aloud to her is because he has a secret, mysterious, dangerous gift—when he reads aloud, objects and characters come out of the books, a skill he discovered when Capricorn, the dark villain of *Inkheart*, came into the world when Meggie was three. Theresa, Meggie's mother, disappeared at the same time, presumably into the story.

Capricorn uses Dustfinger, another character from the story, to lure Mo, Meggie, and Elinor to his hideout village; there Meggie sees a demonstration of her father's reading skill when he brings gold treasure out of *Treasure Island* and a young Arab boy out of *The Thousand and One Nights*. When Dustfinger learns Capricorn's true plans, he helps Mo, Meggie, and Elinor escape over the hills. Mo searches out Fenoglio, the author of the book, and together they devise a plan to defeat Capricorn's terrible schemes. But Meggie is recaptured along with Fenoglio, and Capricorn discovers that she, too, has the same magical gift. In a rousing finish, Fenoglio and Meggie find a way to foil Capricorn's plans, with surprising results.

Discussion Points

Character

1. Why does Mo keep his ability a secret from Meggie? Why has he never told her the truth about her mother?

2. Why doesn't Dustfinger read the ending of the story when he has the chance in Meggie's bedroom? What stops him?
3. Does Elinor like books more than people? Has she truly been happy living alone with all her books? How does Elinor change in the course of the story, and what causes her to change?
4. In what ways does Basta's superstitious nature affect him and others in the story? Why is Basta so superstitious?
5. Why does Farid follow Dustfinger? Why does Dustfinger keep trying to get away from Farid? What does Dustfinger mean when he says he has often just been a spectator?
6. When Meggie and Fenoglio are taken to Capricorn, why isn't Fenoglio afraid? What do you think it would feel like for an author to see his characters in real life? Does Fenoglio ever fear the characters from the book as much as the others do?
7. When does Meggie first realize that her mother is alive and no longer trapped in the story? What do you think it was like for Theresa to be trapped in the book?
8. Fenoglio says he was very proud of writing about the Shadow when he wrote *Inkheart*, so he knows the passage by heart. How does he feel about the Shadow coming to life? Does he really believe he can change the story's ending?
9. Why do Basta and the Magpie remain when the other characters disappear?
10. Why did Fenoglio disappear at the end? Did he go into the book? If so, do you think he planned this? Was it his curiosity about the world of his creation, or was it an accident?

Setting

1. Why does Meggie feel more at home in Mo's van than in their house?
2. What do we learn of Elinor's character from the description of her home?
3. In how many ways did Capricorn make the village where he lives his own? How was it possible for him to create such a hideout in the "real world"?
4. Why did so many of the characters decide to stay in Capricorn's village at the end?

Theme

1. How many secrets can you identify in the story? How does keeping a secret affect a character's life and interaction with others? What does Meggie mean when she says, "Why do grownups think it's easier for children to bear secrets than to bear the truth?"
2. The theme of truth and lies occurs throughout the story. Find examples of times when one character lies to another. Are there times when it is better not to know the truth? When are lies used for good reasons and when are lies used to hurt people? What is the difference between a lie and a secret?
3. Fire represents many things to many people in this story. What is the meaning of fire to Dustfinger? Basta? Capricorn? Mo? Farid? Elinor?
4. Fear is a strong motivating force in this story. Who is motivated by fear? Which characters use fear to control others? Discuss ways in which certain characters control and overcome their fears.
5. What is the author saying about the power of imagination in this tale? How does Mo bring imaginative things to life? Why can't he control the people that come to life through his reading? What is the difference between reality and imagination?

6. Mo tells Meggie that "Most people don't stop to think of books being written by people much like themselves. They think that writers are all dead long ago . . ." Do you think this is true? Is Mo more connected to Fenoglio's story than the author himself? Are you aware of the author when you are reading a book?

About *Inkspell*

A year has passed, but not a day goes by without Meggie thinking of *Inkheart*, the book whose characters came to life. For the fire-eater Dustfinger, the need to return to the tale has become desperate. When he finds a crooked storyteller to read him back he abandons his apprentice Farid and plunges into the pages. Before long, Farid and Meggie are caught inside the book, too. But the story is much changed, and threatening to end tragically.

Pre-reading

List the most important events from *Inkheart* and review the characters on the pages before the opening of chapter one. Predict which characters will change the most in the pages of *Inkspell*.

Discussion Points

1. Despite the reminders of the cruelty of the *Inkworld*, Meggie feels compelled to go and see the wonders of it for herself. What does this tell us about her? Do you think she is being selfish or brave? Would you want to go with her or not?
2. Dustfinger is happier than he was in the whole first book. Why? Have you ever returned after a long absence? What's the best part of coming home? How is he received by those he loves? How does Dustfinger prove that he's changed from his betrayal in the first book?
3. What happened in Dustfinger's world in his absence? Can you imagine missing ten years of your own life? Would you be as willing to forgive as Roxane?
4. Describe Farid. What skills does he develop? How does he become a hero? Is he rewarded or punished for his devotion to Dustfinger?
5. What mistakes does Fenoglio make? Who pays the price for his errors and miscalculations? Is he as important as he thinks he is? In the end, what does he vow? How does he lose control over his own story?
6. Do you agree with Resa's choice to stay with Mo, or not? Is she loyal to a fault? How has her previous imprisonment changed her?
7. How does Mortola try to exact revenge for her son Carpricorn's death? How does the Adderhead foil her plans? Does Basta serve Mortola? How are his attacks thwarted?
8. Why is the Inkworld so enchanting to those who read about it? What would you most like to see from Fenoglio's imagination? Are there any books that would tempt you to enter their world?
9. Inkworld is full of fanciful characters, heroes, and minor characters. Who would you most like to meet in person? Who would you least like to know? Why? How do authors make characters seem real? Which character from the Inkworld is most real to you?
10. Describe the Castle of Night, Mount Adder, and the surrounding landscape. Why do you think Funke decided to have the climax take place in this setting?
11. How does Dustfinger try to cheat his fate? Does it work?
12. Identity is a theme that is explored in this novel. How is Cosimo's replacement different than expected? How is Mo's identity merged with that of the Bluejay? Does he become like him in any

way?

13. In the end, do you think Meggie and her family should travel back to Ombra or try to get home to Elinor's house? Why?
14. How do Meggie, Dustfinger, Farid, Mo, and Resa each end up in the Inkworld? Which character would you willingly follow there?
15. Blame is explored through several avenues in the book. Dustfinger blames Fenoglio for his troubles, Roxane blames Farid for what happened to Dustfinger, Meggie feels responsible for what happened to Mo. Who deserves the blame? When is blame worthless?
16. What is Fenoglio's plan to get his story back under control? How does Meggie become a part of it? Do you think writers ever have the sensation that they're losing control of their stories as they write them? Have you ever felt this as you've created something?
17. "Words were useless. At times they might sound wonderful, but they let you down the moment you really needed them." (p. 264) Have you ever felt this way before? How did words both save and betray characters in the Inkworld? How are words quite powerful in this story and in your own life story?
18. Why is Mo commissioned to create a blank book? What powers does it have? How is it proven to be true? What has Mo done to ensure that its owner shall not keep his awful power? Has he risked too much to save himself?
19. The Adderhead is manipulated by debilitating fear of what? What are you most afraid of? Which characters are able to act despite their fear? Is this bravery?
20. Which character do you think changes the most over the course of the novel? How do they change?

Projects

Language Arts

Create a chart of the characters that includes the following information: a description of each character in your own words, their motivation (or what they want), the obstacles and challenges they face, and their eventual fate.

Reading

Good readers stay involved in a story by constantly making predictions based on their knowledge of the characters, the previous events in the story, their understanding of the genre (or how stories work), and any clues the author may have provided for the reader to find. So, as a great reader, at any point in the story of your own choosing, write a prediction about what you think will happen next to each character. List the evidence that makes you believe this.

Read one of the books mentioned in the story or quoted at the beginning of a chapter. What do you think Cornelia Funke learned about writing by reading this story? What have you, as a writer, learned that you can apply to your next piece?

Writing

Review the quotes at the beginning of each chapter. Which one is your favorite? Why? Find quotes from

your own favorite stories or authors. Write a short narrative inspired by one of the quotes.

Science

Study the nature of fire. What are its properties? How is it controlled or stopped? Are there any positive results from its appearance in a landscape?

Art

Draw, sculpt, paint, or otherwise depict your favorite scene from the novel. In a brief artist's statement, describe why you chose this particular scene and the materials in your piece.

Debate

Reread page 250 concerning written versus oral language and debate the issue. Which do you think is more powerful? Do you agree with Balbulus, "Only the written word is eternal," or are you more convinced by Fenoglio's statement about oral storytelling, "A story wearing another dress every time you hear it-what could be better?"

About *Inkdeath*

While Elinor pines for her family trapped in the Inkworld, they struggle to survive in a world that is ruled by chaos and cruelty. When Mo found immortality for the Adderhead inside a book, he thought it would soon be destroyed by his clever insertion of every book's worst enemy: water. But the Adderhead lives, though he is deteriorating like the book that keeps him alive. Frustrated, he threatens the children of Ombra with slavery if Mo does not restore the White Book. But Mo is busy acting out the epic and heroic battles of the Bluejay, whose identity he has claimed as his own. Resa (expecting their second child) and Meggie are conflicted about staying in the Inkworld with the violence and cursed rulers. Will the self-serving Orpheus stop counting his silver long enough to bring Dustfinger back to help rid the world of the Adderhead? Can Fenoglio ever forgive himself for creating so many fatherless children in Ombra? Will Mo sacrifice himself so the children of Ombra may live free? Read the stunning conclusion to the *Inkheart* trilogy to find out!

Inkdeath Pre-reading

Discuss the ending of *Inkspell*. What was resolved? What questions remain open? Who is in power? Predict what Mo and his family will do.

Discussion Points

1. How does Elinor feel being left behind with her books? Does she still derive pleasure from their company? What does her misery eventually convince Darius to do? How are they welcomed to Ombra? What is it like for Elinor to experience adventure rather than read about it?
2. Why and how does Mo adopt the persona of the Bluejay? How would you feel if he was your father or husband? Should he go on such dangerous missions?
3. Explain how Orpheus is getting by in the Inkworld. Is he clever or cruel? Why does he have so much power? Why won't Fenoglio stop him from changing his world? Why does Farid serve him?
4. When Mo visits the castle in Ombra he is captured by Her Ugliness. What is he surprised to learn

from her? Can he escape? How? Does his curiosity nearly kill him?

5. Mo's family is divided on whether to abandon the Inkworld for the safety of home, or to try to influence the outcome of the story. Which characters want what? How has this changed from the previous books? With whom do you agree? Why? Was Resa wrong to ask Fenoglio and Orpheus to write them home without Mo and Meggie's permission?
6. "After all, that is what you wanted from books: great emotions you'd never felt yourself, pain you could leave behind by closing the book if it got too bad." (p.113). Do you agree? What else do you want from a book? How does the Inkworld trilogy have it?
7. How does the Piper threaten the children of Ombra? Does this lead to Mo's capture or not? Describe the scene where Mo sacrifices himself for the children.
8. Did you consider Orpheus a villain in the previous Inkworld books? Does he become one during this story? What are the qualities of a good villain? Do villains always believe they are more clever than everyone else? Does Orpheus have ultimate power in this story?
9. Describe the character Death and the realm she rules. What threat or bargain does she make with Mo? Why is she so angry with him? Explain what happens when Mo visits her kingdom.
10. How was Dustfinger changed by his time with the White Women? What new skills and abilities does he bring back with him? Which would you most like to see or do? What actions prove his loyalty once and for all?
11. What motivates Her Ugliness? Where do her loyalties lie? Do her actions ever surprise you? How? Why does she move the Bluejay to her family's castle? Do you think she is capable of cruelty?
12. How does Mortola reappear in this story? What effect does she have on the events? Is she rewarded for her treachery? What magpie magic ends up serving Resa? How?
13. How has Meggie changed from the previous novels? Her feelings for Farid, too, change over the course of the book. Why? Do you think she will ever decide to leave the Inkworld or not? Which world would you choose? Why? How does she serve the children of Ombra? Does this make her a hero as well?
14. "A reader doesn't really see the characters in a story; he feels them." Do you agree? How do you imagine the characters in the story? What feelings do each of them evoke in you? Which character is your favorite? Why?
15. At the Castle in the Lake the windows are replaced by "painted views of a world that didn't exist." Do you think some people like to live this way - pretending that the world is different than what it is? Is our reliance on television and fictional families similar to the Castle in the Lake?
16. Orpheus's allegiance is quite malleable. Why? Do you ever change your own allegiance to those you think will win? What is the danger of these shifts?
17. Fenoglio struggles with writer's block and guilt for the way *Inkspell* ended. What do you do when you feel like you have nothing to write? In the end, how does Fenoglio find his voice again? He admits that he is a vain old man. Is he justified in his vanity or not?
18. Describe the events at the human nests. How do the robbers come to find them? What dangers still lurk despite their location? Whom does Fenoglio call upon to aide them in the battle against the Milksop's men? How does this turn out differently than they expected?
19. Explain everything that happens at the Castle in the Lake by creating a timeline of events starting from when Mo, Dustfinger, and Her Ugliness arrive there.
20. In the end, what becomes of Meggie and her family? Are all the villains disposed of or not? Do the heroes get the outcome they deserve?

Projects

Language Arts

Review the quotes at the beginning of each chapter. Which ones most make you want to keep reading the book? Why?

Write a scene that is five years after the close of the novel. Reveal what has happened to your favorite character and their worst enemy, in the style of Cornelia Funke.

Writing

Write a letter from Meggie to her little brother about the differences between the Inkworld and home.

Reading

Understanding the relationship between cause and effect can help a reader understand the connections between character motivations and events. Create a chart that traces the causes and effects of the major events in the story.

Drama

With a partner or in a small group, write a reader's theater script for your favorite scene in the book. Perform it for your class.

Science

Mold destroys the entire library at the Castle in the Lake. Research the properties of mold and its effects on property and people's health.

Art

Produce a commercial or book trailer for the whole *Inkheart* trilogy. Entice readers into the story with your understanding of the series without giving away anything! Share with your class or upload to the Internet.

Design a costume for one of the characters in the novel. Think about the color, texture, and style. You may want to explore swatches in a fabric store, which are usually free if you ask. Also, make notes on any makeup, hair arrangement, etc., that would be necessary for the wearer of your costume to be convincing to an audience.

Discussing All Three Books

1. How does Meggie change over the course of the trilogy? Do you see her as the heroine of all three tales?
2. What place in the Inkworld would you most like to visit? Which fantastical creature would you most

like to see?

3. If you had Mo and Meggie's gift, what book would you read aloud and visit for yourself? Would you be able to resist the temptation to visit another world?
4. Which of the three novels is your favorite? Why?
5. Have you read any other novels by Cornelia Funke? How do they compare to this trilogy?
6. By studying Funke's writing, what can you learn and apply to your own next writing piece?
7. How would you summarize the trilogy in a few sentences to a friend who was interested in learning more?
8. Which villain in the series do you think is the most frightening: Capricorn, Mortola, the Adderhead, Orpheus, or the Piper. Why?
9. Which scene in the trilogy are you most likely to reread? Why?
10. In the end, did Funke leave any room for an additional title or not? How did you feel about the conclusion to the trilogy?

Related Reading

Crossley-Holland, Kevin. *The Seeing Stone*. Scholastic, 2001.

A boy named Arthur, living in 13th century England, watches a story unfolding in a magic stone—the story of the birth and growth of his namesake, the great legendary King of Britain. His story continues in *At the Crossing Places* (Scholastic, 2002).

Mahy, Margaret. *The Great Piratical Rumbustification & The Librarian and the Robbers*. David R. Godine, 2001.

Imagine having a gang of pirates as your babysitters or a librarian who can charm bloodthirsty bandits by reading aloud to them.

Sanvoisin, Eric. *The Ink Drinker*. Delacorte, 1998.

A boy watches a weird man in his father's bookstore silently sipping the words out of the books; following him to a nearby graveyard, he discovers that the ghoulish stranger is a vampire who lives on ink rather than blood.

Townley, Roderick. *The Great Good Thing*. Atheneum, 2001.

12-year-old Princess Sylvie breaks out of the book in which she is a character and into the dreams of her Reader, leading other characters to a new existence where they have to make up their own story, and remind the girl who loves them of the importance of their story.

This guide was written and compiled by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), a reading specialist and award-winning children's author. Visit her website to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.

The discussion questions to the first book in the trilogy, *Inkheart*, were written by Connie Rockman, Children's Literature Consultant, adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature, and Editor of the H. W. Wilson *Junior Book of Authors and Illustrators* series.)

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