

The Book of Time Discussion Guide | Scholastic.com

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About the Book

This time travel adventure—filled with history and heart—takes readers around the globe and through diverse cultures, bringing history to life with vibrancy and intrigue.

Fourteen-year-old Sam Faulkner is devastated when his father disappears, especially since his mother died in a serious car crash three years earlier. Fearing that his father is in danger, Sam searches for clues in the Faulkner Antiquarian Bookstore, which is also their home. There, in the basement among many dusty books, Sam uncovers a curious stone statue, an unusual book, and an old coin. When Sam slips the coin into the statue he is transported to Scotland in 800 A.D.—the age of the Vikings! Running for his life and in search of a way home, trapped in time, Sam is swept from World War I France to ancient Egypt. Finally, with the discovery of additional old coins and the unknowing assistance of his cousin Lily, he finds his way home. Together Sam and Lily realize that the unusual book in the basement reveals the location of the stone statue's time traveler, which leads Sam and Lily to conclude that his father is in fifteenth century Wallachia, home to Vlad Tepes, the real Dracula! Sam is determined to travel to Wallachia to help his father. But when Sam places the coin in the statue, he travels to 1400s Belgium, the wrong destination! Once Sam is home again, the cousins use their wits and some research to delve deeper into the intricacies of the stone statue and its powers. The first installment in *The Book of Time* trilogy comes to a stunning close when Lily stumbles upon proof that Sam's father's life *is* in jeopardy and only Sam can save him.

While Sam is busy traversing time and continents, he's also just a boy. He practices judo and crushes on his ex-best friend, and he thoughtfully navigates his eccentric family, his feelings about his father's behavior, and his own coming of age.

A Conversation with Guillaume Prévost

Q: I understand that *The Book of Time* is your first book for children. Why did you decide to write for children? What do you hope kids will come away with after reading this book?

A: As a writer, I started with a couple of historical mysteries "for adults." I found the writing very interesting but limited by the rules of the genre (believable intrigue, police procedurals, etc.). I felt like letting a big breath of fresh air blow over my characters, and giving free rein to my imagination while keeping the historical context extremely accurate. To jump from the trenches of World War I to the Ramses III royal tomb workers in two chapters is an incredible luxury for an author—a luxury that young adult literature has given me! I hope that when young readers finish this book they will at least think one thing: History is fascinating! Some of them may even be curious enough to follow in Sam's tracks and to go see where and in what eras he traveled. On occasion, Sam turns to the Internet for more information; the reader is invited to do the same.

Q: What kind of research did you do in creating *The Book of Time*? Are the people Sam encounters in his time travels real, as well as the locations and the historical events? Have you actually traveled—in current time—to all the places Sam travels?

A: Beyond the book's adventure and suspense aspect, I was determined that the periods that Sam travels to would be as accurate as possible. Not just movie backdrops, but real moments of history. The illuminated manuscript that Sam manages to save from the Viking invasion (on the Island of Iona around 800 AD) really exists. Likewise, Corporal Chartrel, whom Sam helps during the battle of Verdun, really was wounded in the way I describe. The strike of the workers of Thebes that Sam joins actually happened. And each time these are central plot elements. Tightly linking history and fiction was at the heart of this project! As for actual research, I suppose I'm only doing my job, if not as a historian, at least as a history teacher. That's a job enriched by my own taste for traveling: I have thoroughly enjoyed wandering around Iona and Bruges, in particular.

Q: Sam's time travels are incredibly dramatic and exciting, thus bringing the past to life in a very real way for readers. As a history teacher, how do you engage your students? Are you able to bring history to life for your students in the same way that you do in *The Book of Time*?

A: So far, the French national education system does not allow the Stone Statue to be used in class! But like all teachers, I feel there is a theatrical side to teaching and that the spoken word can be as evocative as the written one, even within a fairly structured program. When talking to my students I tried to stress the human side of history, to help them understand, for example, that the Greeks who invented democracy in Athens were in some ways different from us, but in many others, very similar. That's what makes them close to us, and important and useful to know: They still have things to tell us today. And that approach isn't so different from that of *The Book of Time*.

Q: Is the Stone Statue based on an historical artifact, or is it purely of your imagination?

A: It is not an accident that no one is allowed to enter my secret cave! Everything is there: the Stone Statue, the coins with holes, the Book of Time... Except that this cave is somewhere deep in my brain, so there is no danger I will lose the key to it. Seriously, though, one of the first things I had to do when I dreamed up this story was to take a piece of paper and sketch the Stone Statue, so as to fully understand its mechanism and its potential. Today I keep that drawing carefully hidden, because it has caused a lot of laughter from the people around me.

Q: So often, aspiring writers are advised to write what they know. Are there elements in *The Book of Time* from your own life? And do you have any advice for young authors?

A: There are certainly parts of the book that are taken from my own life. In particular I am lucky enough to have a son and a daughter who share some character traits with Sam and his cousin Lily. Also, like Sam, I have done some judo (without winning any major trophies, alas!) and I like video games, computer technology, rock and roll, etc. In other words, there is a part of me that is still fourteen years old. As for advice to young writers, I'm probably not the best person to give it. But I will say this: On a daily basis, I think writing is more a matter of willpower than talent. Pretty encouraging, don't you think?

Q: The plot of *The Book of Time* is extremely intricate and the characters vivid. Can you share some of your influences as a writer? Where do your inspirations come from? Were you a reader as a child? What are some of the books you enjoyed reading? Do you think they influence your writing as an adult?

A: I was very influenced by what I read when I was young. I was a big reader, because I never found any other activity that so deliciously took me out of the world while teaching me so much about it. Isn't the desire to dive into a book that you are reading one of the strongest of feelings? It was probably the desire to make that feeling last that I always wanted to be a writer. Among the authors who influenced me growing up, Jules Verne was the first to make me passionate about adventure. As an homage, I even made him the hero of one of my books (*Le mystère de la chambre obscure*). I also devoured a lot of mysteries, including the classics: Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Maurice Leblanc, Gaston Leroux, etc.,

which clearly affected my way of building plots. Nothing should be accidental; everything should mean something. This has almost become a way of thinking, and my children now forbid me from saying anything when we're watching a mystery on TV or at the movies, because I tend to quickly spot the guilty party, his motive, and methods. A professional deformity, in some ways. Then, when I was thirteen or fourteen, I went through an intense science-fiction period: Asimov, Van Vogt, Jack Vance, etc. That's related to my desire to invent stories that go beyond a purely rational framework. Add to this a precocious interest in history, and I would say that *The Book of Time* was probably mainly written to appeal to the child I once was.

Q: THE BOOK OF TIME was originally written in French, yes? What role did you play in its translation? Did you work with William Rodarmor, the translator, directly, or through Scholastic, your American publisher? Can you tell us a little about the process?

A: My grown-up novels have been translated into several languages, but my relationship with my translators was limited to a few e-mails to clear up some point or other. With William Rodarmor, all that changed! He started by telephoning me to introduce himself, and we very quickly built a relationship of trust. And he got passionately involved with the text, wanting to know everything about everything, including somewhat remote elements of the historical context that would better enable him to understand this or that detail. He literally bombarded me with messages and sometimes tracked me to my lair, because he wound up knowing the book better than I did! And all this with great good humor. In short, the translation was a novel and enriching experience, and it should continue with the next volumes. We then went over the final version with editor Cheryl Klein of Arthur A. Levine Books, and I was struck by her intelligent reading of the text. So I have been part of the translation process from beginning to end, which is a wonderful piece of luck for the writer, but also, I hope, for the book!

Q: Lastly, can you give us any hints about what's to come for Sam, Lily, and Allan? We can't wait to read more about them!

A: Hmm.... Volume 2 has many revelations for Sam about his father and his family's story, and Lily may wind up more involved in her cousin's quest than she might like. And as in Volume 1, I can promise you a real surprise at the end!

Discussion Points

Characters

1. Is Sam brave because he is willing to risk his own life in order to save his father, or is he a coward because he doesn't want to face Monk? Can a person be both brave and afraid?
2. Even though Sam's father is missing, there is no shortage of adults to care for Sam. Compare Aunt Evelyn and Rudolf "as parents" with Grandma and Grandpa. Who would you respect more? Why? How does Sam's behavior toward the four differ? How does Sam feel about his Aunt and Rudolf's opinions of his father?
3. While Allan Faulkner has not appeared in the story yet, he *feels* very present. What stories and events have brought him to life?
4. Contrast Sam's and his Grandparents feelings toward Allan Faulkner with Aunt Evelyn's. Describe your impression of Allan Faulkner's personality, from his fingernail clipping collection to his Egyptian travels to how he rates as a dad and a businessman.
5. How does Sam's relationship with Lily change over the course of the novel?

6. Sam makes many references to his life prior to his mother's death three years ago. How have his life, his relationships, his schoolwork, and his environment changed in those three years? Has his life changed since his discovery of the Stone Statue? How?
7. The name Dracula conjures up many images and feelings for Sam and Lily, as well as for readers. But what is truth and what is fiction? Discuss what you think you *know* about Dracula. Make a list. Then look up Vlad Tepes and Dracula to see what is true and what is lore, and make a corresponding list. What new information was uncovered? What surprised you? What scared you?!

Setting

1. The author, also a history teacher, says, "When talking to my students I tried to stress the human side of history, to help them understand, for example, that the Greeks who invented democracy in Athens were in some ways different from us, but in many others, very similar. That's what makes them close to us, and important and useful to know: They still have things to tell us today." Pick one of Sam's destinations or his intended destination. What do you think its history still has to tell us? What knowledge can we gain from Sam's experience in that time?
2. Which of Sam's destinations was your favorite? Why? If you could travel in time where would you choose to go? If you couldn't choose your destination would you still choose to travel? What if it were a matter of life and death-like saving your father?
3. The author was diligent in maintaining authentic and accurate backdrops to Sam's travels. List the places in Sam's travels. Choose one and find out more about the place and its people. Describe a difference and a similarity between it and your present location. As the author offers, "On occasion, Sam turns to the Internet for more information; the reader is invited to do the same." So do it!

Plot

1. The author has taken care to plant clues, to foreshadow future events in the current story and in the future books of the trilogy. As the author says, "Nothing should be accidental; everything should mean something." Did you notice that Monk is called a "computer genius" in chapter 1? How does this affect the story later? What other clues/seeds can you identify? Discuss what each clue foreshadows and its significance, what it *means*, as well as what it might lead to.
2. Sam has learned that he needs special coins to activate the Stone Statue in order to travel. He's also discovered the key to being able to return home-the right coin plus someone thinking of him. What eludes him is how to choose his destination accurately. Discuss and hypothesize about how this aspect of the Stone Statue might work? Could it be related to the book or the sunrays on the statue? Other ideas?
3. What makes Rudolph appear to be a suspicious character? Why might he be so interested in Sam? What could be his motives? Discuss how Rudolf might figure into the overall plot of the trilogy.
4. "Beyond the book's adventure and suspense aspect," says the author, "I was determined that the periods that Sam travels to would be as accurate as possible....Tightly linking history and fiction was at the heart of this project!" Look at the settings, the characters, and Sam's research. What seems fictional and what factual? Then look it up for yourself. You might be surprised by the answer!

Theme

1. Heroism is a strong theme throughout the story and among the people Sam meets in his travels, as well as in Sam's own actions. What makes a hero? How is Peneb a hero? How is Yser a heroine? Is Friedrich a hero for risking his own life in order to help Sam? Who else might you consider a hero? Lily?

2. Lily helps translate the Latin that Sam finds in the Constable's laboratory to read: *He who gathers the seven tokens will be the master of the sun. If he can make the six rays shine, his heart will be the key to time. He will then know the immortal heat.* Sam then interprets this text as: *Tokens=coins. U have 2 get 7 coins with holes in them 2 really make the statue work (=choose your time?). The 6 rays R those of the sun. How to make them shine? No idea. The sun must light up, maybe? The immortal heat...U burn but you dont die=heat+immortal. Well I guess. Tell me if that's right according to you.* How else might this text be interpreted? Any ideas how to make the rays shine?
3. Right versus wrong is a strong theme throughout the story, and Sam is faced with many difficult decisions, ethical dilemmas. Was it ethical for Sam to use the cell-phone calculator in order to get the coin? Was it okay for Sam to divulge Van Eyck's secret ingredient to Baltus? Should Sam share what he knows about his father and the Stone Statue with his grandparents? Discuss Sam's motives and his reasoning behind these decisions. Identify additional ethical dilemmas that Sam and other characters face. Would you make different choices? Why?
4. Family loyalty is also an important theme throughout the book. This applies not only to Sam and Lily, but to many of the characters that Sam encounters. Cite examples of characters demonstrating family loyalty or breaking the bond.

About the Author

Guillaume Prévost was born in Madagascar in 1964. He knew from the age of six that he wanted to be a writer, but hardly wrote anything until he was in his mid-twenties for fear that it wouldn't be very good. Instead, he studied literature and history. An alumnus of France's prestigious École Normale Supérieure, he teaches history at a school near Paris. After contributing to the *Histoire* television series and writing various specialized works, he turned to literature, producing a series of well-crafted adult historical detective novels, before writing *The Book of Time*. Prévost lives near Versailles, France.

About the Translator

William Rodarmor is an award-winning French translator, writer, and editor. In 1996 he received the Lewis Galantière Award from the American Translators Association for *Tamata and the Alliance* by Bernard Moitessier, and in 2001 he won for his American publisher the Batchelder Honor Award for his translation of the young adult novel *Ultimate Game* by Christian Lemann. His other young-adult translations include *The Last Giants* and *The Old Man Mad About Drawing*, both by Francois Place, and *Catherine Certitude* by Patrick Modiano. Rodarmor lives in Berkeley, California.

Other Books to Compare and Contrast

A String in the Harp by Nancy Bond, Aladdin, 1996

Baseball Card Adventures Series by Dan Gutman, HarperCollins/Avon, 2000

Both Sides of Time by Caroline Cooney, Laurel-Leaf, 1997

Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett, Scholastic Press, 2004

Dark Shade by Jane Louise Curry, McElderry, 1998

Gregor the Overlander Series by Suzanne Collins, Scholastic Press, 2003

Moon Window by Jane Louise Curry, McElderry, 1996

Mr. Was Pete Hautman, Simon and Schuster, 1996

Out of Time by Caroline Cooney, Dell, 1997

Prisoner of Time by Caroline Cooney, Delacorte, 1998

Running Out of Time by Margaret Peterson Haddix, Simon and Schuster, 1995

Something Upstairs by Avi, Orchard, 1988

The Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen, Viking, 1988

The Window by Jeanette Ingold, Harcourt, 1996

The Wright 3 by Blue Balliett, Scholastic Press, 2006

Time Cat by Lloyd Alexander, Henry Holt, 2003

Time for Andrew, by Mary Downing Hahn, Clarion, 1994

Time Windows by Kathryn Reiss, Harcourt, 1991

Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce, HarperTrophy, 1992

Transall Saga by Gary Paulsen, Delacorte, 1998

Discussion guide written by Leslie Budnick

- Subjects:

Reading, Social Studies, Cleverness, Character and Values, Creativity and Imagination, Determination and Perseverance, Social Studies through Literature, World History

- Skills:

Reading, Nonfiction Texts, Social Studies