

Grades
5-8

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE AMAZING WORLDS OF JENNIFER A. NIELSEN

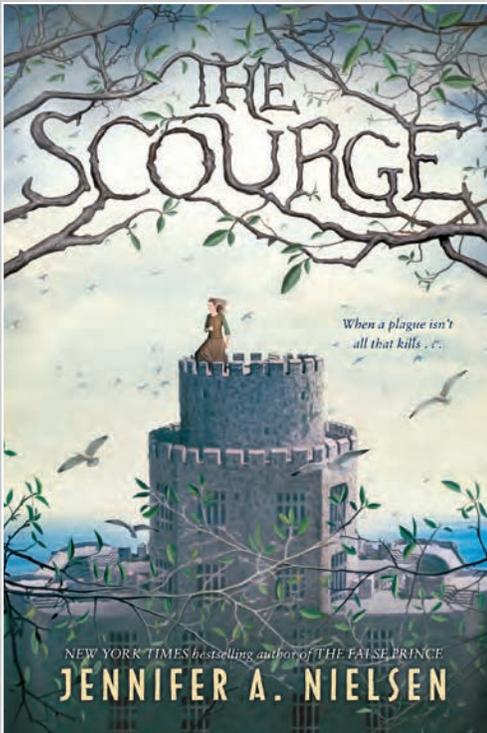
“Nielsen’s plot twists keep coming, and readers will want to see how they play out.”

—*Booklist*



See inside for Common Core State Standards

THE SCOURGE



“Nielsen’s polished fantasy smoothly combines medieval elements with hints of mystery and romance.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Feisty Ani, a likable character who is thoughtful and strong, drives the story forward and keeps readers wanting to know more.”

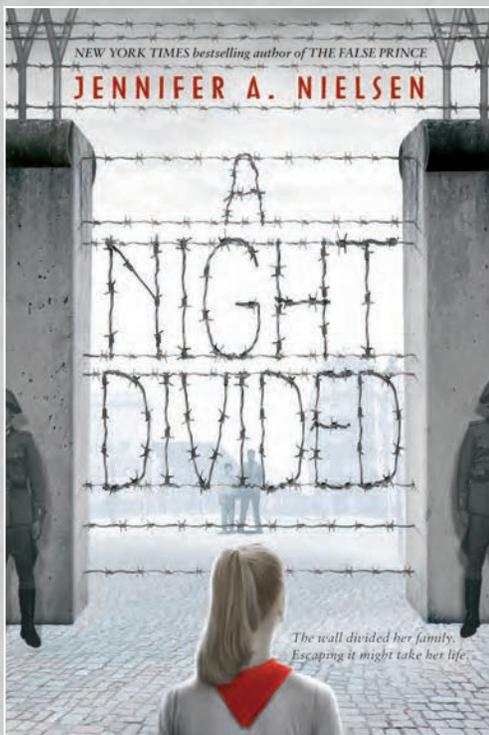
—*School Library Journal*

As a lethal plague sweeps the land, Ani Mells is shocked when she is unexpectedly captured by the governor’s wardens and forced to submit to a test for the deadly Scourge. She is even more surprised when the test results come back positive, and she is sent to Attic Island, a former prison turned refuge and quarantine colony for the ill. The Scourge’s victims—Ani now among them—can only expect to live out short, painful lives there. Ani quickly discovers that she doesn’t know the whole truth about the Scourge or the Colony—she’s been caught in a devious plot. With the help of her best friend, Weevil, Ani means to uncover what is actually happening. But will she and Weevil survive long enough to do so?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the Scourge? How did Governor Felling use the Scourge to her advantage?
2. Why did Ani not want her Scourge scar to completely fade away? What does that say about her and her feelings about her time in the Colony?
3. Using examples from the book, explain how an epidemic that quarantines people away from the rest of civilization could be justified.
4. What methods did Governor Felling, Gossel, and the other wardens use to try to intimidate and control Ani? Were these methods successful or not? Cite passages from the book to back up your answer.
5. Give examples of how Ani is both a flawed and courageous heroine. List and explain two examples of how Ani used the limited resources she had to creatively find solutions to problems.
6. Choose examples from the book to show how Briggs evokes both anger and sympathy from other characters as well as from you as a reader.
7. Using evidence from the book, how do the following characters change over the course of the story: Ani, Weevil, Della, and Briggs.
8. Go back through *The Scourge* and find three instances where the author used foreshadowing. Explain how each one hints at something that happens later in the story and why you think the author chose to foreshadow each instance.
9. What really happened at the infirmary? How do Ani and Weevil find this out? Why were they breeding Dulvanian vipers there?
10. When they first met, Ani and Della did not like each other. Explain how they met, their similarities and differences, and how they became friends.
11. Explain what Governor Felling meant when she told the audience in Keldan, “I had to sacrifice a few to save everyone else.”
12. What happened to Weevil’s father? Why was Weevil angry that Ani gave his mother food behind his back? How did Weevil’s father contribute to exposing the truth about the Scourge?
13. Using examples from the book, examine the relationship between the River People and the Townsfolk. Why didn’t they like each other? What names did they call each other? What stories did they believe about each other? Cite passages from the story to show how the future of their relationship may change for the better.
14. Describe the evolution of Ani and Weevil’s friendship. Use evidence from the book to explain why they do or why they do not make a good pair. How are they alike? How are they different? How do these similarities and differences help them in times of trouble?
15. There are many themes such as prejudice, sacrifice, fear, control, friendship, and isolation throughout *The Scourge*. Choose at least one of these themes and write an essay showing how that topic emerges and evolves throughout the course of the book.

A NIGHT DIVIDED



“The novel’s strong setting and tense climax will keep readers engrossed and holding their breath until the last page.”

—*School Library Journal*

2015 Whitney Award (Middle Grade Category)

2016 Texas Lone Star Reading List (Grades 6–8)

With the rise of the Berlin Wall, twelve-year-old Gerta finds her family divided overnight. She, her mother, and her brother Fritz live on the eastern side, controlled by the Soviets. Her father and middle brother, who had gone west in search of work, cannot return home. Gerta knows it is dangerous to watch the wall, to think forbidden thoughts of freedom, yet she can’t help herself. She sees the East German soldiers with their guns trained on their own citizens; she, her family, her neighbors and friends are prisoners in their own city.

But one day, while on her way to school, Gerta spots her father on a viewing platform on the western side, pantomiming a peculiar dance. Then, when she receives a mysterious drawing, Gerta puts two and two together and concludes that her father wants Gerta and Fritz to tunnel beneath the wall, out of East Berlin. However, if they are caught, the consequences will be deadly. No one can be trusted. Will Gerta and her family find their way to freedom?

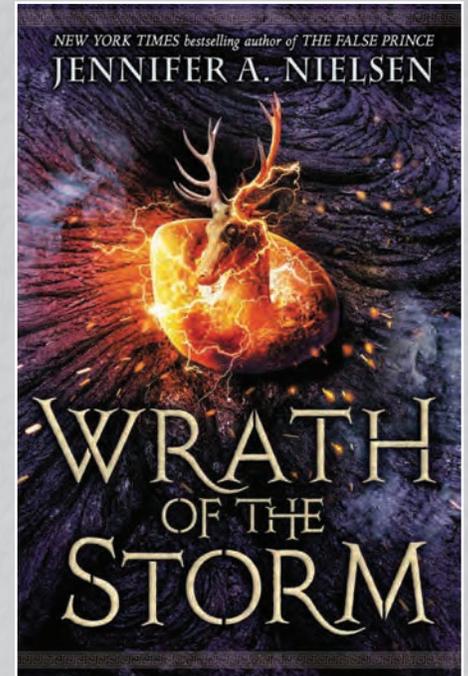
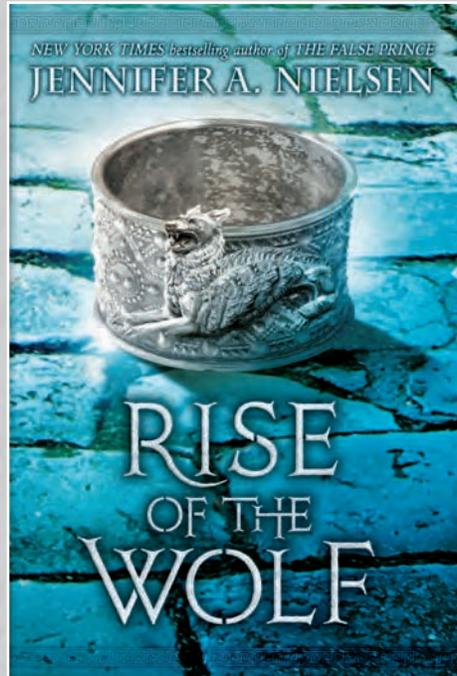
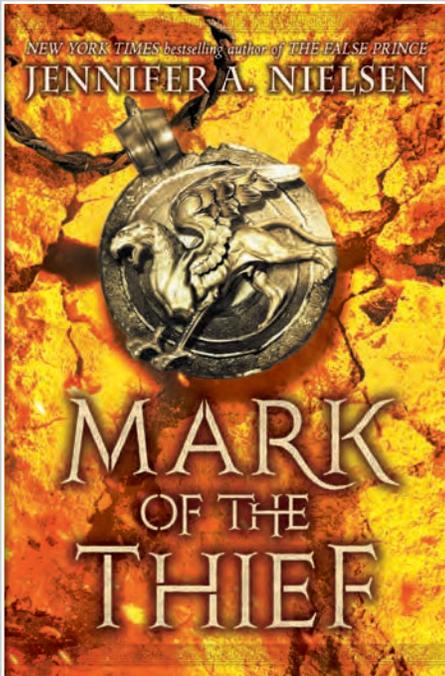
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Gerta was taught that “our strength came from the collective . . . Individuality was a weakness, a sickness of the west.” Do you agree with this statement? Use examples from *A Night Divided* to back up your argument.
2. Fear was a constant presence in all of the characters’ lives. How did fear shape the actions of the individuals in this story? Explain what the actions were and how fear influenced their decisions.
3. In order to pursue their freedom, Fritz and Gerta must lie and steal. There was one instance, however, when Fritz would not steal a shovel. Explain the situation and Fritz’s reasoning. Do you agree with Fritz? Why or why not?
4. The thought “If our lives are so good, we wouldn’t need the wall,” haunted Gerta. Why did she think this? Why might they not need the wall if their lives were good?
3. Gerta’s favorite song, “The Farmer in March,” was an important element in the novel. Find a version of the song, either online or through a library archives, to listen to it. What about the song was comforting and inspiring to Gerta?
4. Communism and Democracy are social, political, and economic ideologies at the center of *A Night Divided*. Pair up with a partner to research and debate this topic—choose which ideology you will support in your discussion, and do research on your chosen side. Write up any supporting and opposing arguments and other notes you might find useful, and discuss with your partner, taking turns to make arguments and respond to each other’s arguments.
5. Draw and label a map of Germany in 1961 to better understand the background and setting of *A Night Divided*. Identify the countries that occupied and controlled the different sectors of the country. Research and explain why the country was divided.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Each chapter begins with a famous quote. Choose one quote to research—find out where it was originally said or written, identify its author, and explain its context in history. Knowing all that, explain the quote’s relevance to the story and how it enhances your understanding of that chapter and the book as a whole.
2. What is the purpose of a resistance group like Aldous Lowe’s? What were three goals of his resistance group? Research resistance groups from various points in history and create a multimedia presentation (either printed out or digitally) to share information about other resistance groups. In addition to images, include information on their goals, beliefs, and methods of resistance.
6. Describe the events of “Barbed Wire Sunday.” This event in history began a long period of isolation and confinement for East Germany. How long did it last?
7. Who were the Stasi? Explain their role in East Germany after WWII. Do organizations like the Stasi exist in the world today?
8. A dominant theme throughout the book is *division*. List three examples of how something in the story is divided, either physically or metaphorically.
9. Gerta and Anna were members of the Pioneers. Describe the organization and compare it to another youth organization. Why do governments or institutions support such organizations? Why did East Germany support the Pioneers?

THE MARK OF THE THIEF TRILOGY



PRAISE FOR THE SERIES

★ “The fast-paced, ingenious plot, charismatic hero and highly diverse cast of characters—including the ancient, eternal city itself—make this series opener a captivating joy ride.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review for *Mark of the Thief*

“This genre mash-up of history, fantasy, and action/adventure is fast-paced and explores themes such as class struggles, familial ties, and the immorality of slavery. Readers will have lots to digest as they quickly flip through the pages to see how Nic will escape his enemies to become a free man.”

—*School Library Journal*, review for *Mark of the Thief*

“Fast-moving fun with broad audience appeal, especially recommended for reluctant readers, Rick Riordan fans, and pedal-to-the-metal adventure aficionados.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* review for *Rise of the Wolf*

With the *Mark of the Thief* series, Jennifer A. Nielsen has woven an electrifying tale of greed and power, magic and destiny, and one boy’s courage at the heart of it all.

When Nic, a slave in the mines outside of Rome, is forced to enter a sealed cavern containing the lost treasures of Julius Caesar, he finds much more than gold and gemstones: He discovers an ancient bulla, an amulet filled with a magic once reserved for the Gods—magic some Romans would kill for. With the deadly power of the bulla pulsing through his veins, Nic finds himself at the center of a ruthless conspiracy to overthrow the emperor and spark the Praetor War, a battle to destroy Rome from within.

In a thrilling quest to stop the rebellion and save Rome, save his loved ones, and secure his own freedom, Nic must harness the magic within himself and defeat the empire’s most powerful and savage leaders.

SERIES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Mark of the Thief

1. Foreshadowing is when an author subtly hints that something is going to happen later in the book. Jennifer Nielsen uses a lot of foreshadowing in *Mark of the Thief*. Look back through the book, find three examples of foreshadowing, and explain how each one hints at events that occur later in the story.
2. Though he was a slave who wasn't supposed to have a name, Nic always introduces himself as Nicolas Calva. Why does he do this and what does it say about him?
3. What is Caesar's bulla and why do so many people want it? How did it get into a cave? How does the bulla change Nic's life?
4. How does Aurelia both help and hinder Nic and his plans for freedom?
5. Describe the mark on Nic's shoulder. How did he get it? What purpose does it serve?
6. Using examples from the book to back up your answer, explain how each of the following characters poses a danger to Nic—Sal, Felix, Radulf, Valerius, and Horatio.
7. Who was Nic's father? Who is his grandfather? Why was his true identity kept hidden from him? What does Nic's newfound identity mean for his future?
8. Why is it hard for Nic to control his magic? Describe two times when it was out of control. How do Crispus and Aurelia help Nic control his magic? Why does Radulf want Nic's magic?
9. While talking about the history of Rome, Felix tells Nic, "We are a product of our history of violence, betrayal, and blood." Use examples from the book to show how this is true.

Rise of the Wolf

1. In the beginning of *Rise of the Wolf*, why does everyone think Nic has the key to the Malice of Mars? What is the key? How does Nic realize he has it?
2. Who are the Praetors? Who do they serve? Why do they want to destroy Rome? How do they want to do this?
3. Citing examples from the book to back up your answer, explain who you believe is more dangerous for Rome—the Praetors or General Radulf.
4. Where does Callistus take Nic the first time he rides him? Who does he meet there? What does this person tell him?
5. Explain what Brutus means when he says to Nic: "Whatever I want from you, all I have to do is choose from those you love, and I know you will give in." How is the opposite true of Brutus?
6. Compare and contrast Crispus and Nic. How are they alike? How are they different? How do they help each other?
7. Who is Atroxia? Explain how she became the Mistress, why she wants the Malice of Mars, and what she will do with it if she finds it.
8. Why is Nic so reluctant to trust Radulf? Is his reluctance warranted or does Radulf really care about Nic? Use evidence from the book to back up your answer.

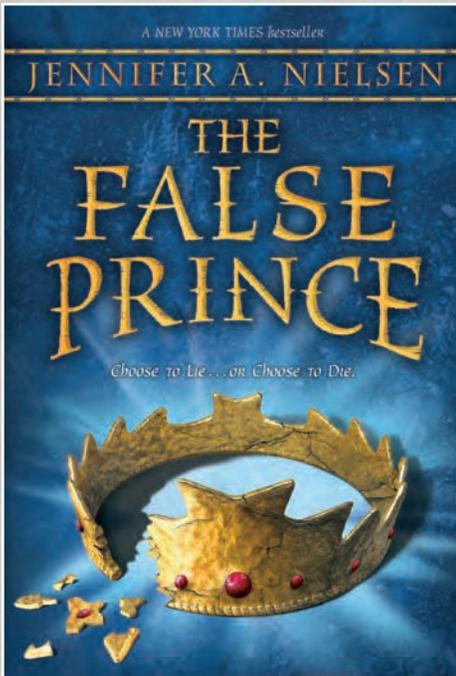
Wrath of the Storm

1. What is the Jupiter Stone? How is it made? Give at least three reasons why Nic and his allies are afraid of it. Why is it Nic's fate to create it? What happened after he made it?
2. Before going to look for the Mistress, Aurelia tells Nic that he has "the wolf by its ears." What does she mean by this? Give three examples from *Wrath of the Storm* that prove this to be true.
3. Nic tells Radulf: "Magic is not good or bad, sir. It's only what we do with it." What does this statement mean? How do Nic's later actions prove this true?
4. How did Nic officially become a free citizen of Rome? Who paid his debt to free him from slavery? Why was the person who paid for it significant? How is this a form of irony?
5. Using examples from the story, explain how the leaders of Rome used the gladiator games to control the empire's enemies, slaves, and free citizens.
6. Why does Domina believe it's Nic's fate to save Rome? What steps does she tell Nic he must take? What does she mean when she tells Nic that in order to win, he has to lose?
7. Forgiveness is a very strong theme throughout *Wrath of the Storm*. Explain how it's integral to Nic's success.
8. Citing examples from the book, describe the differences between the gods Diana and Venus. How does Nic break Diana's curse and stop the rebellion against the gods? How was he able to achieve this?

SERIES EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. The Mark of the Thief books are set in a historical time period. Research at least one of the historical events, objects, or people mentioned in the book and write an informational paragraph about it. Note if there is anything in your research to show that what happened in real life is different from what happened in the story and hypothesize about why the author might have made the choice to write what she did.
2. Most of the Mark of the Thief trilogy is told from Nic's point of view. How does this add to the excitement of the book? Rewrite a passage from the book from a different character's point of view.
3. Nic changes and grows throughout the Mark of the Thief books. Use examples from the books to document these changes.
4. What role do the Roman gods play in the Mark of the Thief trilogy? Choose one god from the book, do research on that figure, and write an informational essay about what you learned.
5. Identify at least two themes from the Mark of the Thief series as a whole, and then use examples from the books to explain how each theme relates to the story.

THE ASCENDANCE TRILOGY



PRAISE FOR THE FALSE PRINCE

★ “An impressive, promising story with some expertly executed twists.”
—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

A New York Times Notable
Children’s Book

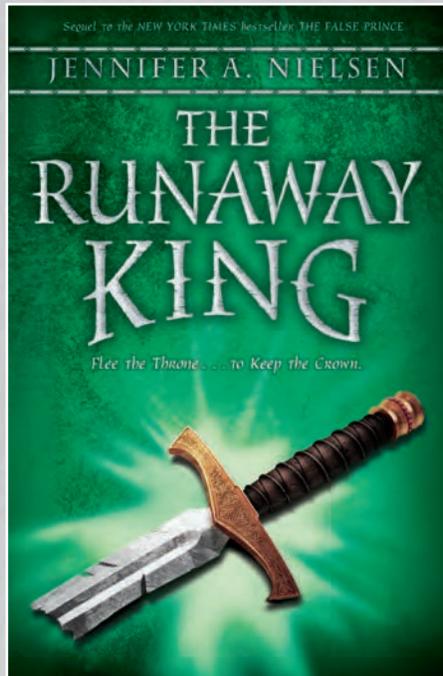
A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year

A Chicago Public Library “Best of the Best” Children’s Book Selection

2016 YALSA Popular Paperbacks List

Winner of the Cybils Award for Middle-Grade Fantasy & Science Fiction

New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing



PRAISE FOR THE RUNAWAY KING

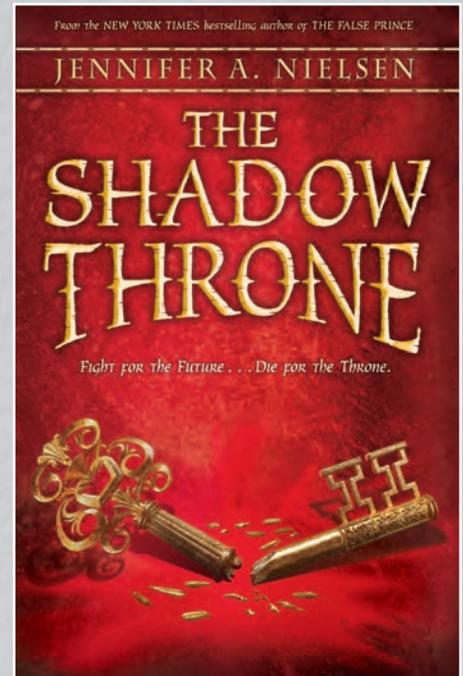
“A fast-paced and thrilling read with twists and turns that never let up.”
—*School Library Journal*

Spring 2013 Kids’ Indie Next List

Barnes and Noble Best Books of 2013 for Teens List

Amazon “Customer Favorites List of 2013”

Whitney Award Finalist for Best Middle Grade Book of 2014



PRAISE FOR THE SHADOW THRONE

“Gripping . . . from one cliffhanging episode to the next, wily Jaron’s rebellious, undisciplined spirit carries the day as he battles to save everything he holds dear.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

2015 Louisiana Readers’ Choice Award Winner (6th–8th Grade)

2015 Oklahoma Sequoyah Book Award (Intermediate)

Spring 2014 Kids’ Indie Next List

2014–2015 California Young Readers Medal

In the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling Ascendance Trilogy, civil war is brewing. In the first installment, *The False Prince*, a nobleman of the court devises a cunning plan to find an impersonator of the king’s long-lost son and install him as a puppet prince. Four orphans are recruited to compete for the role, including a defiant boy named Sage. In a journey filled with danger and deceit, Sage must fight to save his country and save himself.

In the second book, *The Runaway King*, Carthya remains in danger, and a roller-coaster ride of treason and murder, adventure and peril ensues when Sage, now known as Jaron, journeys to the pirates. Then war comes to Carthya’s door as Jaron’s enemies surround him in *The Shadow Throne*.

The action, adventure, danger, and excitement never stop in this epic saga.

SERIES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The False Prince

1. Sage says, “If I had to do it all over again, I would not have chosen this life. Then again, I’m not sure I ever had a choice.” Do you agree or disagree with Sage’s belief? Has something ever happened to you when you thought you had no choice in the matter?
2. What characteristics does Conner see in Sage, Roden, and Tobias that would make each a good candidate to impersonate Jaron?
3. Conner claims that he would do anything for his country. Do you find anything noble in his treacherous plans? Is it ever right to kill for something you believe is greater than yourself? If so, when?
4. Who do you think is Sage’s biggest threat in preventing him from becoming Jaron? Why? Who is his greatest ally? Do you think Sage would have been successful without his ally’s help?
5. The themes of class and social identity run throughout *The False Prince*. Give two examples of each theme.
6. Conner wants to fool the whole country with his plan. Do you think his plan will work? Why or why not? Give examples of how each of the following characters is fooled by another character or event in the story: Conner, Mott, Cregan, Sage, Tobias, Roden, King Eckbert, and Veldergrath.
7. Did you realize who Sage really was before it became clear in the story? If so, when? Why do you think that the author chose to tell the story with this twist?
8. Do you think that Sage will be a better king than the previous leaders? In what ways? Use examples from the book to support your answers.

The Runaway King

1. Jaron risks his identity and life to rescue Nila and bring her to Libeth. Why is Harlowe so nice to Jaron? How does Jaron repay him?
2. What does King Eckbert value more—freedom or peace? Which do you think Jaron values more? Why?
3. The pirate code is very brutal, yet all of the pirates are loyal to whoever is in charge as long as he is just. Is Devlin a good pirate king? Do you think it would have been easier for Jaron to be the pirate king instead of the King of Carthya? Why or why not?
4. After Devlin brands Jaron a pirate, he says, “You belong to the pirates now.” Who or what else has Jaron belonged to? Why can Jaron never be free?
5. List three characteristics that Fink and Jaron share. Do you think Jaron would have survived without Fink’s help?
6. After Roden leaves Carthya at the end of *The False Prince*, why do you think he wants to become a pirate? Do you think he would make a good pirate king? Explain why.
7. Great leaders often surround themselves with great people. How do Kerwin, Mott, and Tobias each contribute to Jaron’s success?
8. Jaron calls Roden “a dangerous enemy but a fierce friend.” Do you agree with this? Why does Jaron insist on winning back Roden’s friendship as well as trusting him as the captain of the guard? If you were Jaron, would you forgive Roden? Why or why not?

9. List three reasons why Jaron could live a happier life as Sage. List three reasons why Jaron could live a happier life as King Jaron. Which persona do you think Jaron would prefer? Why?

The Shadow Throne

1. Look at the cover of *The Shadow Throne*, read the summary, and then think of the plots of *The False Prince* and *The Runaway King*. List three things that you think are going to happen in the story. How do you think The Ascendance Trilogy is going to end? Why?
2. Do you agree with the following statement: “Sacrificing oneself so that others might live was the ultimate act of love,” (p. 255)? Why or why not? Give three examples of characters sacrificing themselves for love from *The Shadow Throne*.
3. Which three characters do you think most helped Jaron win the war and bring peace to Carthya? Why?
4. Discuss Jaron’s relationship with Roden and Harlowe. How have these relationships developed over the course of the book? How did Jaron’s actions (and/or nonactions) make all of their relationships stronger?
5. Summarize the plot of *The Shadow Throne* in one paragraph. Be sure to include the main ideas of the book without giving away the ending.
6. King Jaron had to make many hard decisions throughout *The Shadow Throne*. Examine one of Jaron’s decisions by listing the circumstances surrounding it, discussing how Jaron chose to handle it, and analyzing its outcome.
7. Which theme do you think is more important in *The Shadow Throne*—loyalty or love? Why? Use specific examples from the book to back up your claim.
8. Discuss three ways that the following quote applies to King Jaron: “Rulers aren’t made just because they sit on a throne. A true king serves his people, protects them, and sees to their happiness if he can.”

SERIES EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. In what ways has Jaron grown over the course of the trilogy? List three specific events that demonstrate this growth.
2. Describe the differences and similarities between Jaron and his father, King Eckbert. How do their differences define both of their legacies as king?
3. What is the central idea of The Ascendance Trilogy? How is that theme represented in each individual novel? List three ways it has developed over the course of the trilogy.
4. What traits has Jaron always possessed that make him a good king? Provide examples from each of the three books that show these characteristics in action.
5. If Conner never chose Sage as a possible “false prince,” what do you think would have happened to Carthya? Choose three of the following characters, and write a paragraph about how different his or her life would be if Sage never became Jaron: Roden, Tobias, Fink, Imogen, Amarinda, Erik, Mott, Harlowe, Conner, and Kerwin.



JENNIFER A. NIELSEN is the author of the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling Ascendance Trilogy: *The False Prince*, *The Runaway King*, and *The Shadow Throne*. She has also written the Mark of the Thief Trilogy: *Mark of the Thief*, *Rise of the Wolf*, and *Wrath of the Storm*; as well as the historical thriller *A Night Divided* and the fantasy adventure *The Scourge*. She is also the author of the sixth book of the Infinity Ring series, *Behind Enemy Lines*. Jennifer lives in northern Utah with her husband and their three children. Visit her online at www.jennielsen.com.

Books in This Guide

The Scourge

Hardcover: 978-0-545-68245-9 • \$16.99

A Night Divided

Hardcover: 978-0-545-68242-8 • \$16.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-68244-2 • \$7.99 (available June 2017)

Mark of the Thief

Hardcover: 978-0-545-56154-9 • \$17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-56155-6 • \$7.99

Rise of the Wolf

Hardcover: 978-0-545-56204-1 • \$17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-56205-8 • \$7.99

Wrath of the Storm

Hardcover: 978-0-545-56207-2 • \$16.99

The False Prince

Hardcover: 978-0-545-28413-4 • \$17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-28414-1 • \$7.99

The Runaway King

Hardcover: 978-0-545-28415-8 • \$17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-28416-5 • \$7.99

The Shadow Throne

Hardcover: 978-0-545-28417-2 • \$17.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-28418-9 • \$7.99

Also available from
Jennifer A. Nielsen

Infinity Ring #6: Behind Enemy Lines

Paper Over Board: 978-0-545-38701-9 • \$12.99
Paperback: 978-0-545-90121-5 • \$6.99

Horizon, Book #2—Coming September 2017!

Hardcover: 978-1-338-12141-4 • \$16.99

Audio and ebook versions are also available.

The discussion questions and extension activities in this guide address the following Common Core State Standards. For more information on the standards please visit www.corestandards.org.

Reading Literature:

Key Ideas and Details

Grade 4—RL.4.1–3
Grade 5—RL.5.1–3
Grade 6—RL.6.1–3
Grade 7—RL.7.1–3
Grade 8—RL.8.1–3
Grades 9–10—RL.9–10.1–3

Craft and Structure

Grade 4—RL.4.4–6
Grade 5—RL.5.4–6
Grade 6—RL.6.4–6
Grade 7—RL.7.6
Grade 8—RL.8.5–6
Grades 9–10—RL.9–10.5–6

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Grade 4—RL.4.9
Grade 5—RL.5.9
Grade 6—RL.6.9
Grade 7—RL.7.9
Grade 8—N/A
Grades 9–10—N/A

Range of Reading Level of Text Complexity

Grade 4—RL.4.10
Grade 5—RL.5.10
Grade 6—RL.6.10
Grade 7—RL.7.10
Grade 8—RL.8.10
Grades 9–10—RL.9–10.10

Writing:

Text Types and Purposes

Grade 4—W.4.1–3.E
Grade 5—W.5.1–3.E
Grade 6—W.6.1–3.E
Grade 7—W.7.1–1.C, 2–2.D, 3–3.E
Grade 8—W.8.1–1.C, 2–2.D, 3–3.E
Grades 9–10—W.9–10.1–3.E

Production and Distribution of Writing

Grade 4—W.4.4–6
Grade 5—W.5.4–6
Grade 6—W.6.4–5
Grade 7—W.7.4–6
Grade 8—W.8.4–6
Grades 9–10—W.9–10.4–5

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Grade 4—W.4.7–9.B
Grade 5—W.5.7–9.B
Grade 6—W.6.7–9
Grade 7—W.7.7–9.A
Grade 8—W.8.7–9.A
Grades 9–10—W.9–10.7–9.A



Scholastic Press



This guide was written by Mary Kate Doman, Children's and Young Adult Book Consultant, Author, and Professor.

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.